SEPTEMBER

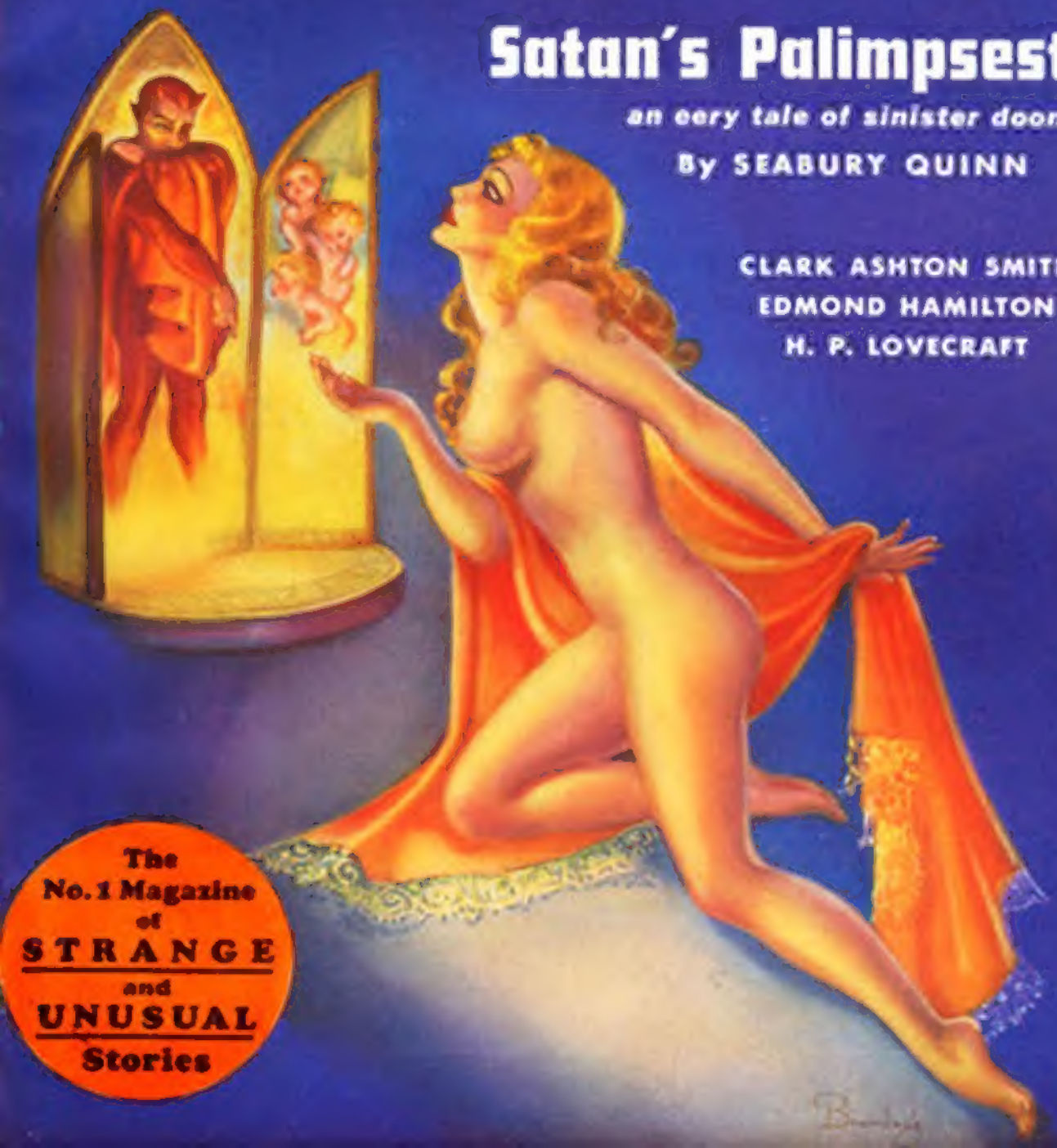
Weird Tales

Satan's Palimpsest

an eery tale of sinister doom

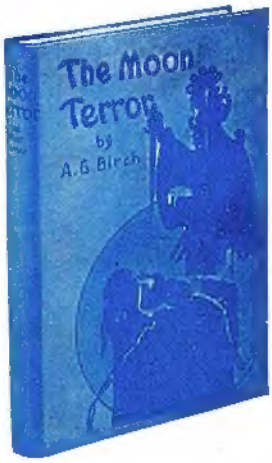
By SEABURY QUINN

CLARK ASHTON SMITH
EDMOND HAMILTON
H. P. LOVECRAFT



The No. 1 Magazine of STRANGE and UNUSUAL Stories

The Phantom of the Ether



The first warning of the stupendous cataclysm that befell the earth in the fourth decade of the Twentieth Century was recorded simultaneously in several parts of America. At twelve minutes past 3 o'clock a. m., during a lull in the night's aerial business, several of the larger stations of the Western hemisphere began picking up strange signals out of the ether. They were faint and ghostly, as if coming from a vast distance. As far as anyone could learn, the signals originated nowhere upon the earth. *It was as if some phantom were whispering through the ether in the language of another planet.*

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"Communicate this to the various governments of the earth:

"As a preliminary to the establishment of my sole rule throughout the world, the following demands must be complied with:

"First All standing armies shall be disbanded, and every implement of warfare, of whatsoever nature, destroyed.

"Second: All war vessels shall be assembled—those of the Atlantic fleets midway between New York and Gibraltar, those of the Pacific fleets midway between San Francisco and Honolulu—and sunk.

"Third: One-half of all the monetary gold supply of the world shall be collected and turned over to my agents at places to be announced later.

"Fourth: At noon on the third day after the foregoing demands have been complied with, all existing governments shall resign and surrender their powers to my agents, who will be on hand to receive them.

"In my next communication I will fix the date for the fulfillment of these demands.

"The alternative is the destruction of the globe.

"KWO"

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A MAGAZINE OF THE BIZARRE AND UNUSUAL

Weird Tales

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Volume 30 CONTENTS FOR SEPTEMBER, 1937 Number 3

Cover Design . . . . . M. Brundage
Illustrating a scene in "Satan's Palimpsest"

The Lake of Life . . . . . Edmond Hamilton 258
A weird-scientific story replete with thrills, adventure, mystery and romance

Night of Unrest . . . . . Robert Nelson 281
Posthumous verse, by a young Illinois poet

Satan's Palimpsest . . . . . Seabury Quinn 282
A tale of weird evil and sudden death—a story of Jules de Grandin

The Ho-ho-kam Horror . . . . . Bruce Bryan 306
It was a very real and tangible horror that descended on the archeologist in this goose-flesh story

The Death of Ilalotha . . . . . Clark Ashton Smith 323
What horrible fate awaited Thulos as he went to keep his love-tryst in the tomb?

The Abyss Under the World (end) . . . . . J. Paul Suter 331
Three men were precipitated into an adventure as amazing as ever befell mortal men

Psychopompos . . . . . H. P. Lovecraft 341
A weird tale in rime, by a late great master of fantastic fiction

Malay Love Magic . . . . . Paul Morand 348
A brief tale about a quaint and curious custom in the Netherlands East Indies

School for the Unspeakable . . . . . Manly Wade Wellman 353
Into what frightful horror did young Setwick blunder that night?

H. P. L. . . . . Henry Kuttner 359
An acrostic tribute in verse to the late Howard Phillips Lovecraft

McGovern's Obsession . . . . . August W. Derleth 360
The story of a crime that occurred in an old house—a crime and a retribution

The Dream and the Shadow . . . . . Robert E. Howard 365
Posthumous verse by a genius of weird literature

Weird Story Reprint:

When the Graves Were Opened . . . . . Arthur J. Burks 366
A story from an early issue of WEIRD TALES, reprinted by request

The Eyrie 378
A department wherein the readers express their opinions

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43

WEIRD TALES ISSUED 1st OF EACH MONTH

The Lake of Life

By EDMOND HAMILTON

A weird-scientific thrill-tale of adventure, mystery and romance—of the waters of immortality, the strange Red and Black cities, and the dread Guardians that watched eternally over that terribly glowing lake

1. The Legion of the Damned

THE heaving blue plain of the ocean stretched far away under the brassy sun. The wind was blowing strongly toward the west coast of equatorial Africa, somewhere beyond the skyline. Under the hard hammering of the gale, the schooner *Venture* scudded eastward with ivory sails arched taut, its forefoot chuckling steadily through the foaming water.

Clark Stannard stood by the little schooner's foremast, his dark, virile face peering frowningly ahead, his dynamic black eyes narrowed against the glare. The hard wind tore at his white shirt and ducks, thrummed in the rigging, whined savagely in his ears. He was feeling again that sick, fatal certainty that the schooner was rushing with him and his five followers toward disaster and death.

For Clark seemed to see beyond the watery skyline the low, green, menacing coast of the French Congo, and beyond that the steaming, mighty jungle of hot rivers and mangrove swamps and hostile tribes through which he must lead the way to forbidden, unknown regions. Why had he ever accepted the leadership of this crazy expedition, this mad, fantastic quest for the legended Lake of Life? Could that fabled Lake of Life and its shining waters of immortality and its dreaded, unhuman guardians have any real existence?

"Ship off the port bow!"

Clark Stannard swung sharply. Ephraim Quell, the dour, taciturn, bony Yankee seaman who stood at the wheel of the *Venture*, was gazing northward across the uneasy sea.

Clark strode rapidly back along the slanting white deck. Ephraim Quell pointed a bony finger north and said in his nasal twang, "Looks like a French gunboat to me."

"A gunboat?" Clark exclaimed, stiffening.

His keen eyes searched the northern horizon. Then he saw the ship—a low, squat gray craft, wallowing southward toward them, the screaming wind tearing a plume of gray smoke from its funnels.

"It *is* a French gunboat!" Clark exclaimed. His fist clenched unconsciously, and there was a savage twist to his hard mouth as he cried, "We'll have to break out more sail, Quell! We've got to reach the mouth of the Bembu River before that gunboat catches us, or this expedition will end right here and now."

Captain Quell warned grimly, "We're carryin' more sail now than we ought to, in this blow."

"Do you want to spend the next few years in a French prison?" Clark demanded roughly. "That upriver country we're headed for is forbidden to all explorers, and the French will jail us for trying to penetrate it. Our only chance is to get into the river before they cut us

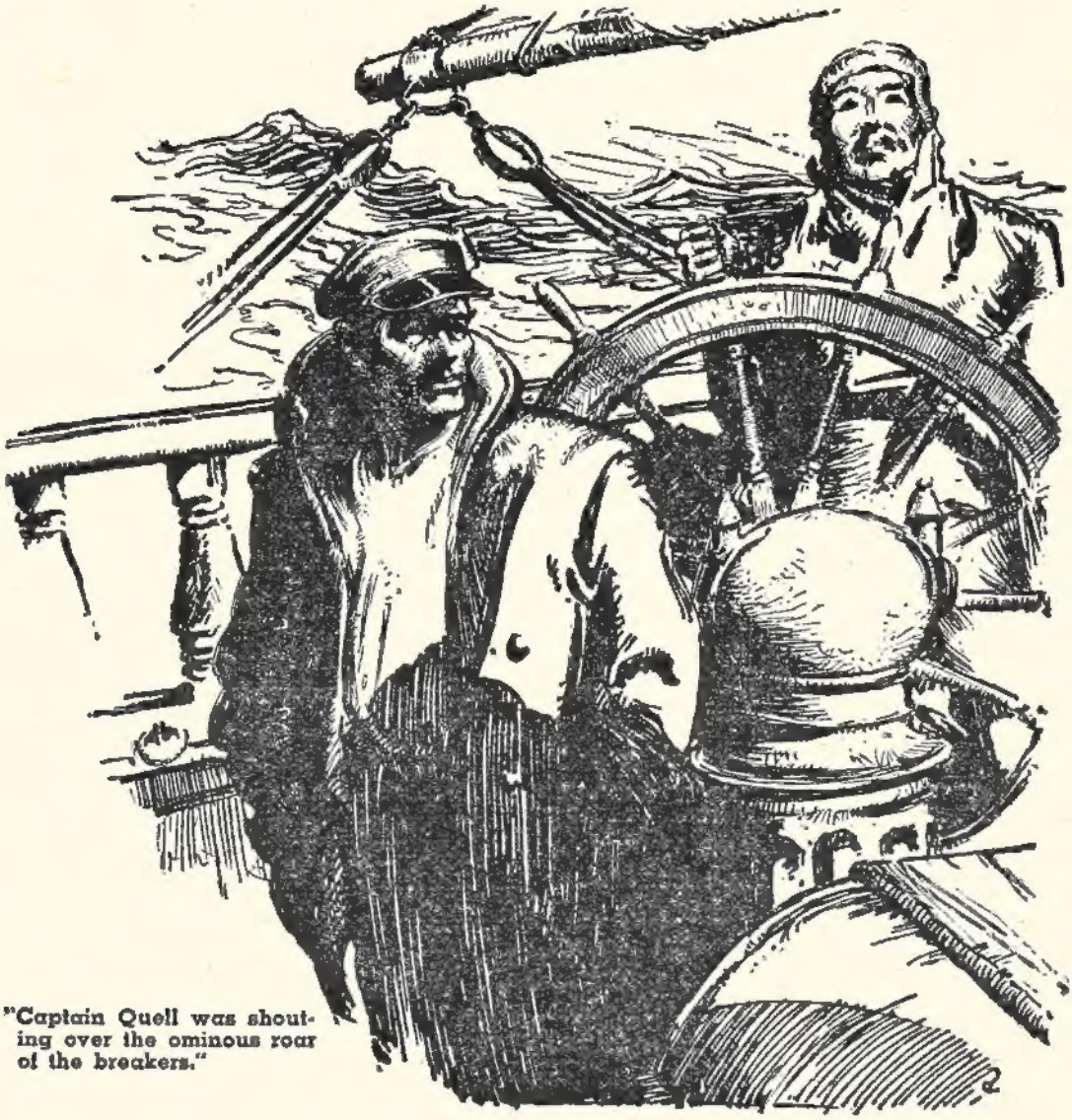
off, and get upriver on our auxiliary power."

Captain Quell made no further protest, but his bony face was an ominous mask as he bawled the order. The four other men on the little schooner's deck leaped to the halyards, quickly breaking out reefed topsails.

The *Venture,* as the additional canvas took the wind, plunged alarmingly, almost burying its bowsprit in the foaming waves. Then it drove on at increased speed, seeming to fly across the choppy swells. The thin plume of smoke northward drew nearer. Simultaneously, a low green line appeared on the horizon ahead.

"There's the coast," Clark bit out, peering tautly forward. "And there's the point north of the Bembu's mouth—steer a little more southward, Quell."

"We may just make it," he muttered, looking again at the ominous smoke-plume northward. "We've *got* to make it!"



"Captain Quell was shouting over the ominous roar of the breakers."

THE four other men of the expedition were now hastening back to the helm, stumbling precariously on the slanting deck. Mike Shinn was the first of them to reach Clark's side.

Mike Shinn was an ex-prizefighter, a squat, gorilla-chested redhead with a battered, merry face. He exclaimed, "Holy mother, the old tub's nearly flyin' now! What's all the hurry about?"

"Trouble?" asked Lieutenant John Morrow in his curt fashion.

Morrow was a former U. S. army officer, a lean, habitually silent young man with shadowed, haunted dark eyes.

Clark Stannard pointed grimly north. "Plenty of trouble, and coming down on us fast. That's a French gunboat chasing us to challenge and inspect us. If they learn we're trying to get up the Bembu to the forbidden Kiridu country, they'll throw us in prison."

Link Wilson, a tall, lanky Texan cowboy with a quizzical, tanned face and cool eyes, drawled, "Sure, I didn't join up with this outfit and come all this way to rot in a foreign *calabozo*."

"Nor me either!" rasped the last member of the expedition as he too joined the group.

This last was Blacky Cain, a former notorious American gangster and bandit. He stared north with hate in his pale eyes and dark, unshaven, predatory face.

The criminal continued harshly, "I've done enough stretches in stir—they're not going to capture me. If they get close enough, I'll turn loose on 'em with one of those typewriters we're packing."

Link Wilson, the Texan, patted his hip and drawled, "I'll take my old forty-fives ahead of your submachine guns."

Clark Stannard's black eyes narrowed and he snapped forcefully, "You men can stop this talk of firing back at the gunboat. We'll do our damnedest to escape them, but no shooting, understand?"

Blacky Cain stared at him in sullen silence. The gangster, like the rest of them, had found during the voyage across the Atlantic that Clark Stannard was their leader not only in name but in fact, and that he meant his orders to be obeyed.

Clark himself had felt since the very start of this crazy expedition that he was leading as desperate an aggregation as had ever been gathered together. These five men whom old Asa Brand had brought together for the expedition were the only kind of men who would have joined such a wild, hazardous venture. They were all men beyond the pale of civilized society, each with a black shadow on his past.

Blacky Cain, the bandit and gangster, had eclipsed the fame of Dillinger and Floyd, leaving a red trail of robbery across America. Link Wilson, the tall, drawling Texan cowboy, had killed two men in a gunfight in a border saloon. Mike Shinn, the redheaded ex-prizefighter, had been barred from the ring for throwing a fight. Lieutenant John Morrow had been drummed out of the army for knocking down his superior officer in a quarrel over a woman. And Captain Ephraim Quell, the bony, taciturn Yankee seaman, had once been master of a large coastal passenger liner; but when a fire that should not have happened had destroyed his ship with great loss of life, the middle-aged Yankee skipper's certificate had been canceled permanently.

Truly, Clark Stannard thought somberly, his five followers were a legion of the damned, a band of ruined, hunted men; men who had nothing more to lose, the only kind who would have joined this fantastic expedition in search of the Lake of Life. None of them had any belief in the existence of the lake, but for the pay old Asa Brand had offered, they had

joined the mad quest for it without qualms. And Clark knew bitterly that he himself belonged with such a desperate band; for he too was desperate, staking his life on the chance that he might be able to find the fabled lake.

Captain Quell's nasal voice declared suddenly, "There's the mouth of the Bembu, isn't it—beyond that point?"

The *Venture* was now a mile from the low green shore. Beyond a humped point of land could be descried the sandy flats and white breakers that marked the mouth of the equatorial river.

Clark Stannard swung his gaze tautly back to the oncoming gunboat. It was racing down from the north, overtaking them with alarming speed, yet still almost two miles behind them.

"We'll make the river," Clark declared. "But it's going to be close."

Bang! A puff of white smoke had issued from the gunboat's deck, and a shot crashed into the choppy sea some distance ahead of the speeding schooner.

"They're firing across our bows to halt us," Clark grated. "Keep right on, captain."

A few moments later another shot came from the gunboat. It hit close to the *Venture's* side, fountaining spray that tore away in the gale. Gray gulls flying low over the wild waves screamed.

"Some shootin'!" jeered Blacky Cain.

The schooner raced like a winged thing past the projecting point into the broad, shallow bay of the river mouth. In a few minutes, Clark thought tensely, they would be safe inside the river where the deeper-draft gunboat couldn't follow.

Ephraim Quell suddenly pointed and shouted, "Look at that bar! It's low tide —we can't enter the river!"

Clark's hopes plummeted sickeningly. Plain now ahead was the mouth of the broad, yellow Bembu, issuing from low green mangrove swamps. And in a straight barrier across the river mouth lay a line of wild, bursting white breakers. The raging waters of the sea were breaking furiously against the bar there, exploding into mad foam that hung in the air like drifting white smoke.

Captain Quell was shouting over the ominous roar of those breakers, "We can't get over that bar till the tide rises."

Bang! The racing gunboat was a half-mile from them, now, and its third shot crashed through the rigging of the schooner.

"They got us, damn them!" cried Blacky Cain.

Clark exclaimed to the Yankee skipper, "No, we're going to try to go in over the bar! There's a spot there at the south end of it that looks deeper—steer there."

Ephraim Quell shrugged his bony shoulders, gripped the wheel and headed the *Venture* toward the slight gap in the breakers which Clark had pointed out. The schooner, borne forward by a sea running with millrace speed, leaped eagerly toward the raving white water.

THE roar of wind and scream of the dipping gulls and crash of breakers ahead was deafening. The gray French gunboat, coming up after them under forced draft, sent another shot after them that missed by yards. Now the mad foam of the breakers was just in front.

Mike Shinn shouted gleefully, "This is more fun than riding the water-chute at Coney."

Clark yelled, "Hang on tight, all of you!"

Ephraim Quell's bony face wore a mirthless, ghastly grin as the schooner rushed into the white foam-smoke of the breakers. Suddenly a grinding crash quivered through the craft's whole fabric. It ended in a terrific shock that rocked

the craft over on its side and flung them all helter-skelter against the rail.

"We've struck!" cried Ephraim Quell. "Her whole bow must be torn out—we can't last ten minutes on this bar."

The schooner, tilted sharply, was hanging on the bar and being smashed and hammered by the terrific waves that rushed in and exploded against it. The thunder of the raging waters was hideous.

Clark Stannard, bruised and shaken, was scrambling to his feet. The other five, tense but unterrified, also regained their feet. It was evident the schooner would quickly be battered apart.

Clark's voice rang hard and commanding over the din. "Get the equipment and supplies into the long-boat! We'll head upriver in it, before that gunboat can arrest us. Hurry!"

While Clark worked furiously to loosen the lashings of the big long-boat, the other five hastened below decks and returned staggering under the weight of rifles, ammunition boxes, rations and medicine cases and other supplies, which they piled into the long-boat. There was no panic and no confusion—only desperate, urgent haste.

The gunboat was standing to at a safe distance outside the bar. Now as the last equipment was loaded into the long-boat, the cracking crash of the schooner's rending timbers gave ominous notice that the *Venture* was about to break up. The men leaped into the boat.

"Lower away!" Clark shouted.

Frantically, Ephraim Quell and Link Wilson paid out the ropes. As the long-boat's keel touched the boiling surf, Mike Shinn and Blacky Cain and Clark pushed off fiercely with the heavy oars.

The long-boat shot into the thick of the raging breakers. They were deafened by the thunder, blinded by flying spray. Clark yelled orders, and convulsively they pulled at the great oars, inching precariously through the breakers into the broad river-mouth.

Then the long-boat won out of the exploding waves, glided into the calm yellow waters of the wide, sluggish river. Before them, its marigold expanse wound inland between thick, dull-green mangrove swamps. As they pulled rapidly upstream toward the first bend, they heard the gunboat firing after them from outside the breakers. The shots fell short —and in a few moments they were around the first bend.

"We made it!" Clark exclaimed. "But we've got to keep going—that gunboat might send boats into the river to pursue us. And it's over two hundred miles upriver to the Kiridu country."

"Oh, Lord!" groaned Mike Shinn ruefully. "That's an awful lot of rowin'."

Clark shrugged grimly. "You'll find it worse when we have to leave this boat and strike into the jungle on foot."

The sun sank in a blood-red murk behind them as they pulled steadily upriver. A humid, stifling heat and swarms of vicious mosquitoes tortured them. On either shore were the endless mangroves, with their impenetrable abatis of tortured, twisted gray branches and dull green foliage. Birds screamed through them and the tall reeds of the mud flats.

Clark looked back down the red-lit, winding river, as his shift at the oars ended. He hoped fervently that the gunboat's officers would not think it worth while to pursue them in small boats upriver. He knew they'd figure he and his men were going into certain death anyway, at the hands of the wild Kiridu tribes. And they might be right.

Clark's dark, virile face twisted in desperate resolution. Neither French laws nor blood-lusting savages must keep this expedition from winning through the jungles of the mysterious Kiridu to the

fabled Lake of Life. He *must* find that lake, must bring back the shining waters old Asa Brand craved. He dared not fail.

2. *The Lake of Life*

CLARK STANNARD had first learned the amazing thing Asa Brand had in mind, in New York weeks before. He had been surprized to receive Brand's note requesting him to call—he couldn't guess what the old multi-millionaire wanted with a penniless young adventurer like himself. But he had obeyed the request promptly, in a vague hope of getting from Asa Brand the money he needed so desperately.

For ten years Clark had batted around the world in irresponsible, adventurous exploring expeditions, heedless of his family back home. But now his father was suddenly dead, and his mother and sisters faced poverty, and his young brother, crippled by an accident, needed an expensive operation if he was ever to walk again. Clark had no way of earning the needed money—his only trade was adventure. So he had snatched desperately at Asa Brand's cryptic request, immediately.

He knew a little about Brand, of course—everyone who read the newspapers did. Old Asa was the third richest man in America, and for fifty years had been reckoned the hardest, most merciless business mogul in the country. His ramified financial interests spread their octopus arms over the whole nation.

Asa Brand received him in bed, sitting propped up against pillows in a luxurious bedroom of his gloomy Fifth Avenue mansion. The old man was quite bald, and his hairless, yellowed skull and wrinkled hatchet-face and scrawny neck made him look like an ancient, unclean vulture. He peered at the young man with shrewd, bright blue eyes.

"Stannard, I understand you've made two exploring trips into inner French equatorial Africa," he said in his cracked, shrill voice. "They tell me that you know the hinterland there as well as any white man living."

That, Clark admitted bluntly, was true. But he added, "I know the country as far in as the Kiridu region, but not beyond. No white man who ever went into the Kiridu has come back, not even two airplane mapping expeditions that tried to fly in there some years ago."

Asa Brand's Adam's-apple worked in his scrawny throat and there was a pulse of repressed eagerness in his bright blue eye as he asked, "Have you ever heard of a weird lake that's supposed to exist deep back in the Kiridu country—one called the Lake of Life?"

Clark nodded, surprized. "I've heard the native legends. The tribes believe the story absolutely, and their fanaticism on the subject is why no white man is allowed to enter the Kiridu."

Asa Brand, his bald vulture-head leaning eagerly forward, urged, "Tell me what you've heard about it."

Clark said thoughtfully, "Well, the yarn is current among all the Central and West Africa tribes, and they all say the Lake of Life lies somewhere back in the Kiridu country. They say the waters of that lake shine like light, and that those shining waters contain the pure essence of life. They believe all life on earth began somehow from the lake, and say that whoever drinks its waters becomes immortal, undying.

"But they also say that nobody can drink the waters of the Lake of Life, for it is surrounded by a ring of mountains which they call the Mountains of Death. No living thing can cross those mountains, they claim, for there is a terrific *juju* or spell on them that kills instantly. And they add that even if one could cross

the mountains, he could not drink of the Lake of Life, for it is guarded by mysterious beings, called The Guardians. The natives won't speak much of those guardians, but say that they are very terrible and powerful, and that they are not human."

Asa Brand's eyes were shining with tremulous emotion. His cracked voice rasped, "Yes, yes—that is the story which I have read. Tell me, Stannard, what do you think of it?"

Clark pursed his lips thoughtfully. "Well, it may be that mountains really exist back in the Kiridu, and that there's a lake at the center of them, which the blacks have seen or heard about."

"But what do you think of the story that the waters of the Lake of Life contain the essence of life?" asked Asa Brand eagerly. "That drinking them would vastly extend one's life-span?"

Clark stared at him. "Why, that is obviously nothing but a wild native fable."

Asa Brand started as if stung, and demanded shrilly, "How can you be so sure? You've never seen that lake—no white man has. How can you tell what great powers its waters might have?"

And as Clark's black brows drew together incredulously, Brand continued excitedly, "Since I first heard of the legended Lake of Life, I've got hold of every possible scrap of information about it. I'm convinced the lake exists, and that its waters do possess supernatural virtues."

The old multi-millionaire's eyes glowed with his dream. "There *must* be more than fable to it when millions of African natives believe in it so utterly. It's always been a belief of mankind, that some secret spot holds the pure essence of life, the potentiality of immortality. The ancient Hebrews thought of it as a tree of life, but the Greeks and later the Arabs maintained it was a spring or lake. The Crusaders sought for it in Syria, and Ponce de Leon hunted it in America.

"Why is such a thing impossible? Scientists to this day don't know how life started on earth. The theory that life sprang from the waters of the legended lake is no more fantastic than any other theory. And if that lake *was* the source of earth's life, if its shining waters hold the pure essence of life, it must be true that anyone who drank those waters would live vastly beyond the ordinary human span."

Clark watched the feverishly excited old man in wonder. Then Asa Brand, abruptly calm, said flatly, "I'm going to send an expedition to that part of Africa to find the Lake of Life."

"BUT such an expedition is impossible, sir!" Clark said, astounded. "The natives regard the whole Kiridu country as sacred, and kill any white man who enters it. And because such intrusions stir all the tribes to wild turmoil, the French colonial authorities have strictly forbidden explorers to enter the Kiridu."

He added, "Of course, it's a worthy ambition of yours to want to add to scientific and geographical knowledge—"

"Scientific knowledge be hanged!" shrilled Asa Brand. "It's not to add to scientific knowledge that I'm sending the expedition. It's because that expedition is going to bring me back some of the shining waters of the Lake of Life; waters that will prolong my life, perhaps for many decades, when I drink them."

And as Clark stared stupefiedly, the old man's excited anger dropped from him. He suddenly looked a shrunken, withered, fearful thing, and his voice was a cracked, hoarse whisper.

"Stannard, I've never feared anything in my life, but I'm afraid now. I'm afraid of dying. My doctors say I can't live more than a year or two, and that

they can't do anything for me. And I don't want to die, I mustn't die, I *won't* die! For I haven't lived yet! I've spent all my life gathering money, and never took time really to live and enjoy myself. That's why I must put off death, for a while at least—I want to live before I die. If medical science can't help me, I'll look elsewhere. And this Lake of Life—it's a chance. Its waters may keep me living for many years, for decades even, if you can bring some of them back to me."

"If *I* can bring them back to you?" Clark repeated, startled. "You don't mean that——"

Asa Brand nodded his vulture head. "Yes. I've picked you to lead the expedition. You know the country, you can do it.

"Here is the proposition. You'll be furnished what men and equipment you need and you'll go to Africa, penetrate that unknown region, and find the Lake of Life. You will bring me back a flask of its shining waters. When you do that, I'll pay you a half-million dollars."

"And if I don't bring the water back?" Clark asked. "If I can't find the lake, or if I'm killed in there?"

"Then you get nothing, and your heirs get nothing," Asa Brand snapped. "Only when you deliver into my hands a flask of those shining waters will you receive your pay. I believe that those waters will extend my life greatly, but even if they prove without virtue, you will have been paid for procuring them for me."

A cunning, menacing expression entered the old man's eyes as he added, "But don't think you can accept my proposition and then trick me, Stannard. Don't think you can bring back a flask of ordinary water and fool me. The waters of the Lake of Life are shining waters unlike any other on earth. I'll know if you try a trick, and you will receive nothing."

The senile multi-millionaire leaned forward tensely. "Well, do you accept the proposition?"

Clark felt himself forced to a desperate decision. The young adventurer had no faith whatever that the waters of the fabled lake possessed the power of immortality. But there was a good chance that a lake of shining waters did exist back in the unknown Kiridu. Phosphorescence or radio-activity made such a shining lake a possibility.

And if it did exist and he could reach it and bring back a flask of its waters to this death-fearful old man, Clark would receive half a million dollars—enough, more than enough, to make the future secure for his helpless family.

Yet it was a deadly dangerous gamble. He knew well the slim chance any white man had of entering the Kiridu country and escaping death from its fanatic, savage tribes. And if he was killed in there in the wild search for the lake, what of his sisters and brother and mother?

Clark's brown, rugged face became rock-like as he made his decision. He told old Brand, "I'll go." He added, "I'll need four or five men, at least—we'll have to strike into the Kiridu afoot from the headwaters of the Bembu River, and you can't use native porters, for they won't take white men into that sacred country. I don't know where you'll find men who will join such a risky venture."

"I'll find the men," Asa Brand's cracked voice had promised with eager readiness. "And they'll be men who won't balk at any danger."

Asa Brand had found just such men. By devious ways and agents, he had brought together the five hard-bitten, ruined, hunted men who had agreed to follow Clark Stannard to the devil himself as long as they received the pay the old millionaire promised, when they returned.

Brand had procured the schooner and equipment, too, following Clark's specifications and lists. And two weeks after his first meeting with the old financier, his desperate expedition in search of the Lake of Life had sailed for Africa.

3. *The Mountains of Death*

BOOM! *Boom!* Through the suffocating noon hush of the jungle throbbed the odd, percussive sound, like the deep quavering of muted gongs.

Black heart of Africa, throbbing in hate and menace! Its malign whisper was a sinister promise. *Boom! Boom! Boom!*

Mike Shinn gave up his oar to Lieutenant Morrow and scrambled back to lie panting in the stern of the long-boat, his huge, freckled fist dashing a rivulet of perspiration from his brow.

"I *wish* those damned drums would stop," he panted. "This rowing's got me hanging on the ropes anyway, without havin' to listen to that day and night."

Blacky Cain turned his unshaven, predatory face from his oar and snarled, "You and me both. You'd think there was a thousand jazz bands in this damned jungle, to hear it."

Clark Stannard, his hard brown face a little gaunt from the past week's strenuous toil, told them grimly, "Those drums are the telegraph system of the jungle tribes. They've kept tabs on us ever since we first entered this Kiridu country."

The long-boat was forging slowly up an upper tributary of the Bembu, a black creek no more than a hundred feet wide. On either shore there rose, not the obscene mangrove swamps of the coastal region, but a solid wall of towering, stupendous trees. This was the true jungle, the mighty equatorial forest that blanketed the heart of the dark continent. Huge banyans and baobabs and ebony trees interlocked branches, laced into solidity by snaky lianas and rubber-vines and climbing palms.

This insanely luxuriant vegetation teemed with life. They had heard the distant trumpeting squeal and crash of elephants many times in the last week. The chatter of birds and scolding lemurs was silenced ever and again by the squall of an angry leopard. Submarine-like hippopotamuses swam from in front of the long-boat in ponderous alarm. Crocodiles crashed and splashed through the reeds, and millions of mosquitoes swarmed out onto them from the eternal twilight of the dank forest.

Eight days had passed since they had started up the Bembu. Eight days of heat and mosquitoes and back-breaking toil, during which they had crept deeper into the forbidden Kiridu country, first up the main river and then up this narrow, unexplored tributary. Clark estimated that they were nearly three hundred miles inland; and that they were well into the Kiridu was indicated by the ominous throb of the native *goudougoudous* or signal drums, which they had been hearing for two days.

Clark said, "I think we'll reach the end of this creek before long. Then we'll try to get bearings on those mountains, the Mountains of Death, that are supposed to encircle the Lake of Life."

Ephraim Quell broke his usual dour silence to say, "Queerest course I ever sailed on—hunting for a lake whose waters give immortality, surrounded by mountains they call the Mountains of Death."

"Yeah, it's all a wild pipe-dream of old Brand," rasped Blacky Cain. "But what do we care, as long as he pays off? Me, I didn't come for the pay but to get out of the country. I was gettin' too hot."

Lieutenant Morrow, tugging at his oar, remarked curtly, "There may be more

to the legend of the lake than we think. After all, science has no idea really how life started on earth."

Mike Shinn grunted, "I'd trade you my share in the lake right now for a dozen bottles of cold beer."

"And I'd trade mine for a tall drink of tequila and a good-lookin' *muchacha,*" drawled Link Wilson with a slow grin.

Clark sensed rebelliousness in them. He told them forcefully, "There must be some kind of unusual lake in here. And wherever or whatever it is, we're going to find it."

Yet Clark could not blame them for not believing. His own sober sense rejected the possibility of the lake. It was only desperation that made him cling to the hope of its reality; for unless it existed, unless he reached it and returned with some of its waters, he had no hope of getting the money his family needed so desperately.

Onward they toiled, six browned, unshaven men in solaro-cloth suits and dirty pith helmets, forcing the heavy long-boat up the narrowing ceek. There was no complaint from any of this hard-bitten crew as they struggled on through the stifling afternoon hours. Yet their nerves rasped to the ceaseless, monotonous throbbing of the drums.

By midafternoon, the creek had narrowed to a shallow stream barely thirty feet across. Huge trees interlaced arched branches above them to shut out the searing sunlight, so that they rowed on in strange green gloom. The dank, heavy breath of the jungle was overpowering here. Then they rounded a bend, and at once stopped rowing. Ahead of them the stream ended in a swampy, unnavigable slough.

"This is all the further *this* boat's goin'!" exclaimed Mike Shinn.

Clark Stannard nodded. "From here on, we go on foot. Pull over to the shore and we'll beach the boat there."

THEY dragged the heavy long-boat through the squashy black mud and papyrus reeds to firm ground. There they piled out and stood, panting and slapping vainly at the fiendish mosquitoes.

Clark cast keen eyes around the jungle. He noted a huge banyan tree that towered far above the rest of the forest.

He ordered crisply, "Get our equipment and supplies out of the boat and divide them among the pack-sacks. I'm going to climb that banyan. If the mountains exist, they should be visible from up there."

Clark found it hard getting up the lower part of the giant banyan, but once in the upper branches the climbing was fairly easy. It was a different world up there, a swaying green world of dappled sunlight and clinging vines and flashing birds. He reached the highest attainable crotch, two hundred feet from the group, and then peered north and eastward. His sweeping gaze abruptly fixed.

He was looking far across the sunlit green roof of the jungle. In the dim distance, a short range of steep, dark mountains rose at least ten thousand feet above the steaming forest. Huge, frowning ramparts and scarps and ridges lifted like menacing fangs. And his heart leaped as he saw that the frowning range was ring-shaped. He was looking at the rumored Mountains of Death, and they were real.

Clark's black eyes slitted in excitement. If the mountains existed, might not the shining lake supposed to lie inside them exist also? He could not understand the reason for the extraordinary ring-shaped formation of the range. Then, as his eyes swept along the circular rampart, he made out the silver thread of a narrow river that seemed to flow with great

swiftness through the jungle toward the mountains.

He carefully took compass readings, and then excitedly descended. He told the others, "The Mountains of Death lie east-northeast from here. They're no more than forty miles away—we ought to make them by late tomorrow afternoon."

They shouldered the heavy pack-sacks into which the equipment had been divided, and picked up their automatic rifles. Bandoliers were slung over their shoulders, and the packs contained a store of ammunition for the heavy pistols in their belts.

Clark pointed out an elephant trail leading east. "We'll have to follow the game trails. It would take days to hack a path."

They moved forward along the winding elephant trail, which was like a tunnel through the solid green jungle. Their rifles were in the crooks of their arms; their eyes intently scanned the walls of vegetation on either side, alert for a sudden, yelling, savage attack.

But though they pressed on through the long, hot hours for the rest of that day, no attack came. The drums seemed to throb faster, louder, as they slowly advanced to the mountains. The hollow boom came from ahead, from behind, seemingly from everywhere. It whispered of gathering forces, of impending onslaught, Clark knew.

As they marched eastward, they glimpsed ever and again the dark, frowning ramparts of the mysterious mountains. And when night fell, and they made a fireless, watchful camp in a little clearing, Clark and his men could see the distant ridges and scarps black against the African stars, a giant and unbroken ring of titanic peaks and ridges.

"What the devil made the mountains round like that?" Mikh Shinn asked, puzzled. "They look just like a big fence put up there."

"I've no idea of the cause of that ring-shaped formation," Clark admitted. "It's quite unprecedented, as far as I know. We may be able to learn more about it when we reach the mountains tomorrow."

"*If* we reach them tomorrow, you're meanin'," drawled Link Wilson, reclining with his rifles across his knees, rolling a brown-paper cigarette. "The *hombres* beatin' on those tom-toms may have different ideas."

They all listened. In the solid blackness of the jungle night, the throbbing boom of the drums was much louder, brutal in its hate and menace. They seemed to hear vague whispers, murmurs of stealthy movement in the forest, ghostly gathering of phantom hordes.

The six men slept in shifts that night, waiting tautly for the expected attack. But the unseen natives made no attack, and when the blood-red dawn came, they shouldered their packs grimly to go on.

They made their noon halt in a game trail less than five miles from the base of the mountains. From here they had a clear view of the steep, dark slopes of the weird range, lying barren in the hot sun without any speck of vegetable life on them. A feeling of awe gripped Clark's men as they stared.

They had just started forward again, when Ephraim Quell halted suddenly. His nasal voice exclaimed, "Listen!"

CLARK halted with the others, listening. No sound broke the green, twilight stillness of the damp jungle.

"The drums have stopped," said Quell tightly.

"Thank the Lord for that!" muttered Mike Shinn.

But Clark's brown face stiffened. He said, "When the blacks suddenly stop

the *goudougoudous,* it means they're ready to attack. They must already be near us in the jungle. On toward the mountains, men!" his voice rang harshly. "On the double quick!"

They started forward along the wide game trail on a rapid trot, heavy packs thumping against their backs, rifles raised.

Suddenly a spear flashed out of the jungle wall like a streak of light. Link Wilson ducked, whirled and fired in a flash, and the crack of the rifle ended in a shriek of agony.

Instantly a tremendous roar of savage voices broke from the surrounding forest.

"Amafuka Kilima Amafuka!"

At the same moment, a shower of spears shot out of the green forest into the trail.

But the spears missed the white men. On the instant that the lank Texan had fired, Clark Stannard had yelled to his men.

"Ambush! Into the jungle!"

He had dived toward the trees on the right, the men plunging after him. For to remain in the open trail was to permit themselves to be stricken down by spears to which they could not answer.

They crashed into a green gloom that seemed peopled thick with black warriors lying there in ambush. Hideous, nightmare shapes they seemed in that weird twilight, tall black warriors who wore head-dresses of black plumes and whose naked bodies were painted from head to toe with ghastly white skeleton outlines. They looked like crouching skeletons in the forest gloom, and they were momentarily taken with surprize by the swift crash of the white men into their midst.

Then for moments it was a wild chaos of hellish battle between Clark's men and the natives into whom they had plunged. Hideous shrieks and the whizz of spears rang chorus to the staccato roar of rifles as the white men shot.

Mike Shinn, his clip emptied, clubbed his heavy rifle and with a roar of rage crashed its butt down on a black-plumed head. Link Wilson reeled back against a tree, gun arm running blood from a grazing spear-wound, but with his left hand he jerked out his belt pistol and shot with the swiftness of a wolf's snap. Clark saw a hideous, skull-painted face drive inward beneath his last bullet, and yelled for his men to group together around a great tree.

They had cleared that immediate portion of the jungle of the blacks, but with a raging roar, the others who had lain in the prepared ambush were surging wildly across the trail and through the trees toward them. The white men were hastily jamming fresh clips into their guns, except for Blacky Cain, who was pawing desperately in his pack-sack.

"Kilima Amafuka!" screamed the charging blacks.

"Here they come!" twanged Ephraim Quell's voice.

Clark and four of his men turned loose with the rifles, and over the roar of them heard spears thudding into the tree against whose giant trunk they stood. The skeleton-painted blacks came on.

"Stand aside!" yelled Blacky Cain's voice.

The gangster had pawed out of the pack-sack the submachine gun he had brought with him. He had fitted a drum of ammunition, and now, holding the deadly weapon hip-high, he let go with it.

An unseen sword of lead from the Thompson gun sliced across the advancing skeleton-like horde, and the front rank of the blacks fell like ripe wheat. Cain thrust in another drum, and again the deadly stutter broke above the savage yells. The blacks recoiled through the trees from that terrific hail of death.

"They can't take it!" yelled Blacky

Cain, a wolfish, mirthless grin on his face. "They're scramming."

"We've only checked them," Clark shouted. "There are hundreds of them —we've got to get out of here or we'll be annihilated. Quick, toward the mountains—they're our only chance."

They started a desperate retreat through the tangled jungle. None was badly wounded, but Clark knew it was but a matter of minutes before the savages recovered from their setback.

"They're Amafuka—it means People of Death," he exclaimed as they hastened. "And they were shouting *'Kilima Amafuka'*—Mountains of Death. There's a chance that they'll be too superstitious about the mountains to follow us, if we can get to them."

Lieutenant Morrow, his lean young face dripping but coldly unperturbed, nodded agreement.

"If they do follow us onto the mountains, our number will be up," he said indifferently.

"Boy, I haven't had so much fun since my mob stuck up the Midwest National," rasped Blacky Cain, cradling the submachine gun affectionately as he backed after them through the gloom.

SPEARS began to flash after them through the jungle as they retreated toward the mountains. The Amafuka were recovering from the surprize of the machine gun, and with mad yells of heart-chilling rage were surging through the forest after them.

Clark and his men halted for a moment and turned to send another deadly hail of lead through the trees. Then they pressed desperately on. Ahead, the dark, frowning slopes of the mountains were now visible through the trees, as they approached the end of the jungle. The uproar of the battle and retreat was sending birds and monkeys and small animals racing ahead of them in wild panic.

Closer after them came the Amafuka, and again they had to halt and fire back to hold the blacks off. Clark's rifle barrel was hot in his hand, and the reek of burned powder mixed with the dank breath of the jungle in his nostrils. Then through the thinning trees ahead, he saw the base of the dark rock slope, a hundred yards from him.

"Run for it now!" he cried. "Once up on that slope, we'll have a chance to hold them off if they dare pursue us there."

The six adventurers crashed through the last trees and undergrowth, more birds and monkeys and squealing wild pigs bolting in front of them. They emerged onto the strip of grass between the jungle and the first outcrop of the dark rock. From that first ledge, the barren rock slope loomed up in vast, frowning mystery, a titan wall.

The Amafuka in the jungle uttered a chorus of wild yells as they saw the white men running toward the rock slope. Clark, in the lead, was within twenty feet of the rock ledge when he suddenly saw something that made his brown face go sickly gray.

"Stop, for God's sake!" he yelled, halting.

The others jerked to a halt. Clark pointed a trembling finger ahead. "Look——"

Two of the wild pigs bolting before them had run up onto the dark rock slope. The two animals were stricken with instant, incomprehensible destruction.

For as the animals set foot on that dark ledge, there was a flash of white force or fire from the rock on which they trod. It reduced the two little running beasts instantly to scorched, shriveled carcasses.

"God above, the natives' belief about

the Mountains of Death is *true!"* Clark cried. "It's death to any living thing that sets foot on those slopes!"

4. *Into the Mystery*

THE six men stared, transfixed with stupefied horror. The frowning slopes of the looming range suddenly seemed unearthly in menace, a mysterious death-trap into which they had almost run. Clark Stannard's mind was whirling madly. God! what *was* the invisible force that invested these mountains and that had struck like lightning?

In Clark's mind like a tolling death-bell rang the words that he himself had spoken not long before. "The natives say that nobody can cross those mountains, for any living thing that sets foot upon them is slain instantly."

Incredibly, horribly, that was a fact. The Mountains of Death were a deadly barrier that no man could cross.

"Here come the savages!" yelled Ephraim Quell's harsh voice.

Clark spun with the others. The skeleton-painted Amafuka were charging through the trees toward the little group of petrified white men, spears leveled, eyes flaming, shouting madly.

"Kilima Amafuka!"

"Good gosh!" cried Mike Shinn. "They're tryin' to force us back onto the slope!"

The Amafuka were pouring out of the jungle in a solid mass, racing to get within spear-throw of the white men. Clark's voice blared, instinct for leadership flaring up in this incredible dilemma. His men knelt, fired their rifles as fast as they could pull trigger. Then Blacky Cain's submachine gun tore loose with the whir of a striking rattler.

An unseen death lashed among the charging savages and dropped them in heaps. Others behind the dead tripped on the bodies, and as they stumbled, soft-nosed rifle bullets slammed into them. The raving warriors could not stand such punishment, and again recoiled with shrieks of rage into the jungle.

Clark straightened and looked at his panting, desperate crew. Their faces powder-grimed, their clothes torn by the flight through the jungle, they were a wild-looking group. Blacky Cain, a lighted cigarette dangling from his lips, was glaring at the jungle. The lank Texan's lips were tightly compressed, his eyes icy with menace.

Clark, even in this desperate moment, felt a surge of pride in his followers. Disgraced, criminal fugitives they might be, but, by heaven, they were men! Not on one face was there any panic. They looked as dangerous as cornered panthers.

"We've got to get out of here," Clark said swiftly. "Those Amafuka will wait until night and then rush us and finish us."

"Don't know where we can go," said Ephraim Quell nasally. "I don't hanker to try climbing those mountains, now."

"That's just what the cursed scouts want us to do, damn their black hearts and hides!" said Mike Shinn wrathfully.

"Climbing the mountains is out of the question," Clark said rapidly. "God knows what weird force clings to them, but it is deadly. It looks as if a vast electrical charge invests the mountains and kills anything that makes contact with it. Our only chance is to march along the base of the mountains, holding off the Amafuka, until we can find some pass or gap by which we can pass in through the mountains. I don't think the Amafuka would follow us to the inside of the range."

As the six adventurers put Clark's plan into effect, the savages started to boil out of the jungle toward them. But the

men halted and fired a rapid volley that sent the blacks back into the forest. The six marched on, following the base of the deadly range eastward.

Clark's gaze swept desperately along the frowning peaks and buttresses in vain search for a pass through them. His heart held a foreboding chill, for nowhere along the titan barrier could he descry any break or gap. And as the six pressed on, they glimpsed the ghastly painted shapes of the Amafuka slipping along in the jungle, keeping pace with them. For a half-hour the taut march continued. Already the sun was declining ominously toward the west.

Then the white men stiffened as there came to their ears a dim, distant roaring sound from ahead, throbbing through the tense silence in unbroken rhythm. Ephraim Quell looked startled.

"That roar sounds like——" he began.

"Look, there's a pass in the range!" cried Lieutenant Morrow suddenly, pointing a lean finger.

CLARK had already seen, and his heart bounded with hope. A half-mile ahead the titanic cliffs were broken by a narrow, crack-like split, a chasm extending inward through their rock mass.

The men pressed forward with quickened pace, taut with expectation and hope. The dull, unbroken roar from ahead came louder and louder to their ears. Link Wilson glanced at the shadowy shapes of the Amafuka, keeping pace with them inside the bordering forest.

"Somethin' wrong here!" muttered the lanky Texan. "They must know we're headin' for that pass. Why don't they try to stop us?"

"Sure, they've had a taste of our guns and they don't want another match with us," answered Mike Shinn jubilantly.

But a few minutes later, as the six men came abreast of the chasm-like pass, they halted with cries of despair.

Across their path lay a river that flowed out of the jungle and into that chasm. And what a river! A deep, raging body of water a hundred yards wide that ran with mill-race swiftness between dirt banks littered with dead trees and debris. A cataract rushed wildly and with a steady roar, straight into the chasm in the deadly cliffs.

The chasm itself was a mere crack in the frowning range, its walls going up vertically for thousands of feet. And the raving, roaring waters flowing into it completely covered its bottom with their foaming flood.

Clark Stannard, his hopes plummeting to black despair, remembered now that he had seen this river from the top of the huge banyan when he had first descried the Mountains of Death. Now it barred their way, trapped them. They could never swim this mad stream.

"This," said Lieutenant Morrow calmly, "ends our retreat. For good."

"I knew those damned blacks had some object in lettin' us retreat this way," gritted Link Wilson. "They know they've got us cornered now."

The Amafuka, as the white men halted, had halted also, extending their line across the way Clark and his band had come, and also through the jungle to a point farther up the river. They squatted down, a grimly waiting horde.

"They're waiting for darkness," rasped Blacky Cain. "Then they'll rush us and rub us out—and we can't get away."

"Sure, it looks like this is the final round, at that," said Mike Shinn, scratching his red head.

Clark's eyes had been sweeping desperately along the raging river, following it where it entered the chasm.

"By heaven," he exclaimed, "they may rush us at dark but we won't be here.

We're going to go down this river, through that pass in the mountains. It's our way inside the range."

They stared incredulously at him. He added swiftly, pointing to where the wild cataract entered the chasm:

"Look, you can see fish leaping in the water in there inside the chasm. That means that the bed of the river is not charged with the deadly force like the rest of the mountains — probably the waters have eroded down to ordinary rock. And that means we can go down the river, and if we don't touch the chasm walls, we won't be killed."

"Go down that river?" echoed Mike Shinn. "Are ye crazy, man? No swimmer could live a minute in that hell-stream."

"We're not going to swim," Clark declared. He pointed at the debris of dead trees and brush lining the banks. "We can make a raft, by using some of those vines to tie dead tree logs together."

"That we can," declared Ephraim Quell suddenly. "There's plenty of stuff there."

"Ride down that river, into those cursed mountains, on a crazy home-made raft?" gasped Shinn.

"It's our only chance," Clark declared. "We've got to escape the Amafuka before dark, and we've got to get into the inside of this range somehow. This gives us a chance to do both things. Quell, you and Morrow help me with the raft," he ordered. "Blacky, you and Link and Mike stay up here on guard."

The Yankee captain and the ex-army officer clambered down the dirt bank with Clark. Rapidly they selected dead trees of suitable size. Then the hand-axes came out of their belts and they began working furiously under the broiling late afternoon sun. Chips flew, sweat soaked their shirts, as they trimmed and shortened the trees.

Desperation, lent by knowledge that death awaited them if they did not make their escape by dark, drove their muscles to the last ounce of effort. One by one, the logs were shortened and trimmed and dragged into the quiet waters of a small eddy. The men started laboring to fasten them with long, tough vines from the masses of debris. Suddenly up on the bank, two rifles cracked and the submachine gun whirred fiercely.

"Here come the savages!" yelled Mike Shinn. "They've seen what we're doing —they know we're tryin' to get away."

Clark climbed up the bank's top swiftly. Some of the Amafuka had reached a point where they had glimpsed the raft-building activity, and were now coming on in wild fury.

"Quell, you and Morrow finish tying together those logs," cried Clark to the two men below. "The rest of us will hold off the blacks till you finish—but for God's sake hurry!"

THE whole horde of the Amafuka was charging. The natives were mad with rage as they saw their prey preparing to slip from their grasp, and their skull-painted faces were hideous masks of fury. Clark threw himself down between the Texan and Mike Shinn, and the three rifles and the Thompson gun poured a stream of fire into the savages.

But this time the Amafuka came on! They leaped over their own dead, their shrill yells wild over the thunder of waters. Blacky Cain dropped the empty submachine gun, hastily dug in his pack-sack. He fished out an oval steel object, tugged at it, then flung it forward.

Crash! The thing exploded in the midst of the blacks and flattened a score of them in bloody heaps. They sucked back in momentary terror. Another hurtling steel object exploded amidst them.

"I thought those two pineapples would

come in handy if I brought 'em along," Blacky Cain laughed wolfishly.

"Hurry, Quell!" called Clark down to the two laboring men below. "They'll rush us again in a moment. They're coming now!"

The Amafuka were diabolical in their rage. Again they charged forward, spears glinting thick in the sun, plumed heads bent low as their wild yells split the air.

Clark Stannard knew with sinking heart that they couldn't be stopped this time. Blacky Cain, his lips curled back in a mirthless grin, had drawn his heavy automatic.

"Raft's ready!" yelled Ephraim Quell suddenly.

"Come on!" shouted Clark to the other three.

They scrambled down the bank. There in the eddy floated the crude raft of heavy logs, lashed precariously together with tough lianas. Morrow stood on it with two long poles, ready to push off, and Ephraim Quell was at a big, crude steering-oar he had affixed in an upright crotch at the rear.

Mike Shinn and the Texan leaped onto it, followed by the snarling gangster and Clark. Then Clark grabbed one of the long poles and he and Morrow pushed frantically. The heavy, clumsy raft swung out with maddening slowness toward the raging current.

The Amafuka burst into view along the bank in a solid wave. Their screeches ripped the air as they saw their prey escaping. Their spears flew in a deadly shower toward the raft. But the raft had swung into the wild rush of the main current.

Instantly the raging waters gripped the clumsy craft and whirled it around so suddenly that the men were flung down onto the rough logs. Spinning, tossing, the raft was borne with nightmare speed down the wild current toward the opening of the narrow chasm.

"Quell, head her around!" cried Clark over the surging roar. "If we crash into the walls of the chasm, it's death!"

Ephraim Quell was straining at his big, crude steering-oar to swing the craft around in the current, to bring it frontforemost. His bony form tensed, his face crimsoned, as he fought the current.

The long raft's bow came slowly around. The yelling Amafuka on the bank had already dropped far back, and now the craft was rushing and dipping over the foaming waters, right into the chasm in the looming range.

To Clark Stannard, kneeling precariously on the rough logs at the front, it was as though they had been suddenly transported out of the hot sunlight into another world—a world of weird twilight, of dull, thunderous, bellowing sound.

On either side of them, the dark, jagged sides of the chasm soared upward out of sight, stupendous rock walls through which the river ran with nightmare speed. Its deafening roar reverberated hollowly between those walls like the bawling and bantering of hoarse, titanic voices. On they rushed, through the unearthly, shadowy twilight, at breakneck speed.

The chasm, and the river in it, turned sharply not far ahead. The raft, slow to turn even in the swift current, was flung toward the rock wall that it was death for any life to touch.

"Fend off!" screamed Clark to Morrow, kneeling and thrusting furiously with his long pole toward the rock wall. Morrow did the same, while Quell fought frantically with his oar to help them.

Their poles hit the rock wall—and white flashes of fire-like force leaped from the rock and burned and scorched the ends of the poles. Clark and the

ex-army officer were almost thrown off the raft by the thrust against their poles. But they clung to it, and the raft veered from the menacing wall, whirled round the turn in the chasm.

On and on—a nightmare, crazy rush through the deadly walls, borne on the raving, foaming flood. Again they had to thrust wildly to keep the raft from scraping along the rock side. Clark glimpsed Shinn and Link Wilson and Blacky Cain crouching at the center of the raft—the prizefighter's battered face stupefied, the Texan's eyes narrowed to slits, Blacky's harsh visage wearing its fighting snarl.

"Raft's beginning to come apart!" yelled Ephraim Quell over the din of waters, pointing wildly with one hand.

The hastily-lashed vines that tied the logs together were beginning to loosen under the battering of the current. The raft threatened to disintegrate under them.

"It'll last a little longer!" Clark cried. "We must be nearly through the range by now!"

He knew that already, so tremendous the speed of this unthinkable current, they had rushed for miles into the heart of the Mountains of Death. And they were still dipping and racing forward, still riding the foam-maned waters down the twilight length of that narrow, titanic canyon.

The waters roared louder. Clark Stannard glimpsed that ahead the river dropped in a long, steeper grade at the bottom of the chasm, a rapid of breathtaking incline, down which the waters rushed as though with wings. And the raft was almost at the head of that rapid.

"Here we go!" cried Mike Shinn, eyes blazing.

The raft seemed to poise a moment at the very brink of that incredibly slanting rapid. Then with a wild, sickening swoop, it flashed down the current with dizzying speed.

Dark walls of rock flashing past, wild roar of maddened waters in their ears, a giddy sensation of falling like that in a diving airplane—these were Clark's chaotic, numbed sensations.

He glimpsed Quell working futilely with his steering-oar, trying to steady the raft, and glimpsed the liana lashings bursting and breaking rapidly. Down, down, they rushed—and ahead Clark suddenly glimpsed the end of the chasm, saw sunlight beyond it.

The raft flashed forward like a winged thing, shooting down the last of that sickening water-slant, and plunged suddenly out of the weird, roaring twilight of the chasm into hot sunlight and open air. Before them stretched a vast space.

"We're *through!*" yelled Lieutenant Morrow. "We're through the mountains —inside the range."

"Good God, look at that!" cried Mike Shinn wildly, pointing westward. "A city!"

Clark Stannard's senses seemed to reel. There stretched before him in the blazing, waning sunlight the space that lay inside the ring of the Mountains of Death —a circle of mingled forest and plain, fully fifty miles across, ringed round by the vast, deadly range. Straight into this prisoned land the raving river flowed with unabated speed.

And over there, miles away to the west, close to the inside wall of the looming mountains, rose a crimson city—a fantastic city of blood-red domes and roofs and streets, belted round with a high, scarlet wall. Incredible red city of this fantastic, hidden realm! Clark wondered

fleetingly, did that city hold the legended Lake of Life?

"Here goes the raft!" bawled Ephraim Quell. "We'll have to swim for it!"

He managed by frenzied effort to steer the disintegrating raft almost to the bank of the raving river. But now the logs were giving way, spreading under them, as the last lashing came apart.

"Grab your packs—let the rifles and bandoliers go!" Clark yelled to his men.

Crash! Almost on his word, the raft struck a hidden rock. Instantly the few remaining lashings burst, and as the logs flew apart under them, they were all thrown into the crazy current.

5. *The Crimson City*

THE only thing that saved Clark Stannard and his companions was the fact that the rock on which the raft had split was near the shore. Had the raft broken up in the middle of that wild, foaming flood, they must inevitably have been drowned. As it was, Clark rose out of the waters, one hand gripping his heavy pack, and found that a few convulsive strokes brought him to water in which he could stand.

Quell and Lieutenant Morrow had reached the same safety, and Link Wilson was fighting to their side. But Blacky Cain would have been swept past in the current had not Mike Shinn reached and grabbed his collar. The prizefighter exerted his tremendous strength, drew the gangster into the shallower, quieter water. He stood up, spitting and sputtering disgustedly. Then they climbed up onto the bank, flung down their soaked packs, and for a few minutes stood gasping for breath.

Clark stared westward at that weird city which he had glimpsed in the tense moment when the raft first emerged from the chasm. From here he could see only the crimson tips of the few high domes and towers in it, lent an additional blood-like brilliance by the glinting red sunset. The others were staring too, a dripping, desperate little band.

"A city, here inside the Mountains of Death!" Clark muttered. "Who'd have dreamed it? It means there must be people here——"

"Yeah, and maybe those people won't exactly welcome us with the glad hand," said Blacky Cain grimly. "We've got our pistols and a few hundred shells for them in the packs, and that's all."

Clark's hopes were suddenly soaring. They had done what had seemed so impossible, had penetrated the seemingly impassable barrier of the deadly mountains. If the shining lake really existed in here they would find it somehow. And he felt now that some sort of lake must exist in here, for the legend of the Mountains of Death was already verified.

"It's jest come to my mind," Ephraim Quell's nasal voice twanged, "that we're in here where we were trying to get, but that there ain't any way out. We can't climb over those mountains and we can't float *up* that plaguy river."

"Gosh, that's so, isn't it?" said Mike Shinn, scratching his red head. "I never thought of that."

"We'll worry about getting out when the time comes," Clark said sharply. "Our object right now is to find where the shining lake lies. I think we'll first reconnoiter that red city, and if its people look friendly, we can enter it and ask about the Lake of Life."

"That's the stuff," nodded Blacky Cain approvingly. "Always case a joint carefully before you try a job there."

They started across the grassy plain dotted with clumps of brush and trees, heading toward the red city and the blazing sunset. Clark's eyes swept puzzledly around the inside of the great ring-like range, as they advanced. It looked like a

vast crater, now that they were inside it. It looked—the thought startled him—like one of the giant craters on the moon, formed long ago by the impact of colossal meteors.

"Someone comin'!" hissed Link Wilson suddenly. "Over there!"

His keen ears had perceived a movement. Clark whispered a command, and he and his men crouched low in a thicket of brush. Their automatics were in their hands. Then they heard the unmistakable sharp thud of horses' hooves. The lank Texan's eyes brightened at that sound.

The rushing of hoofbeats came closer, then slower. Peering from the brush, Clark saw that a band of a dozen men had ridden up from the east. Now they had halted in the brush, a hundred yards away, and were dismounting from their horses.

They were white-skinned men, Clark saw. They wore cap-like black metal helmets and short tunics of woven black metal-mesh, and had long swords at their belts. He heard Mike Shinn gasp in surprize at sight of them.

"Don't show yourselves," Clark warned. "They don't look friendly to me."

"Nor me either," muttered the ex-prizefighter. "Lookit the size of the toad-stickers they're wearin'."

A slender young fellow who seemed the leader of the black-armored men was giving orders in a low, authoritative voice. The band split up. Two remained holding the horses while the rest moved stealthily through the brush, parallel with Clark's hiding-place, toward the west.

It came to Clark that these black-armored men were spying on the red city, for all their attention was directed on the distant towers and domes that blazed crimson in the sunset. They had their swords in their hands, and their extreme caution betokened strong desire on their part to remain undiscovered by the inhabitants of the red city. It flashed over Clark that these must be men of a different city or people. He decided quickly that the best part for his band was to lie low.

But Clark's intentions were all overturned in a moment. The black-armored ones suddenly became aware of their presence. One had cast a cautious glance toward their hiding-place, then at sight of a waving bush had uttered a low cry. Instantly all of them spun around. Their slender young leader rapped out a sharp command. They came in a silent deadly rush toward Clark and his men, swords raised, white faces grim. Concealment was no longer possible, and Clark and his five men leaped up.

"Fire, men!" Clark exclaimed.

Their pistols blazed a stream of flame into the middle of the charging group, Link Wilson's big forty-five booming over the sharper rattle of the automatics. Five of the black-armored attackers fell, one of them being the slender young leader. The others halted aghast, obviously never having witnessed the effect of firearms before.

Then they made off in a wild, scrambling run for their horses, leaving their five dead behind them. Blacky Cain raised his gun to fire after them, but Clark struck it down.

"No, no more shooting! That repulsed them, and we'll need all the ammunition we have."

"Look at 'em go!" cried Mike Shinn gleefully. "Knocked out in the first round!"

CLARK was not feeling so elated—they had repulsed the attack, but they had also been discovered. His brown face grim, he strode forward to examine the dead men. He turned one over. His

face was a white, aquiline one with long thin nose and thin lips. His sword was of fine steel, well worked. The black armor was bronze, somehow tinted.

"Here's one that's still alive," said Lieutenant Morrow suddenly. He was bending over the young leader who had fallen. Clark saw as he came up that a bullet had merely grazed his temple, stunning him.

"Put him out of his misery," rasped Blacky Cain, raising his gun.

"None of that," Clark said sharply. "We may be able to get information from this fellow about the Lake of Life."

He pulled the black bronze helmet off the unconscious youth's head. Then he stared in stupefied surprize. From under the helmet fell a thick torrent of silky, blue-black hair that dropped down around the pale, unconscious face.

"Good grief, it's a dame!" stuttered Shinn.

"Yeah, a regular gun-moll," said Blacky Cain, surprized. "She was leading the others when they charged us."

The girl's breast rose and fell under her woven black metal tunic. Then her eyes opened. Deep blue eyes they were, not static and serene but flashing with electric sparks like stormy summer skies. Her features were small, chiseled, stamped with a fiery, challenging force. As she looked up at Clark, remembrance came to her and she struggled to rise, her white face flaming with wrath, feeling wildly for the sword that had dropped from her hand.

He gripped her, but it was like struggling with a wildcat. Her supple, chain-encased body twisted with mad frenzy, naked arms and legs thrashing, her bare knee digging into his stomach. Her blazing eyes raged at him without a spark of fear, only hate and fury, as he grabbed her wrists and held her.

"Stop it!" Clark said roughly. "No one's going to hurt you."

The girl could not understand his English, of course. But she hissed snarling words that, to his amazement, he *could* partly understand. They were in a language that seemed much akin to Arabic, which he knew; not the same at all, but so similar that that tongue might have been an ancestor to Arabic in the dim past.

"Dogs of Reds!" she hissed. "What magic did you use to slay my men? Give me my sword, and I'll face it!"

"There was no magic," Clark told her in Arabic. "We killed your men because you tried to kill us. We are not Reds."

She understood, though his modern Arabic must have had a strange sound to her ears. But her fighting, tigress face did not relax; her chiseled nostrils flared with fury.

"You seek to trick me with lies!" she raged. "Even now your hearts are glad that you can take me prisoner to Thargo. Well will he reward you for using your magic to capture Lurain, daughter of Kimor."

"What the devil is she ravin' about?" Mike Shinn asked eagerly. "You seem to get it, chief."

"She thinks we belong to that crimson city," Clark said rapidly, holding the struggling girl. "Undoubtedly she and the other black-armored ones are from a race or city enemy to the red city."

Then he turned back to the raging girl and told her emphatically, "Lurain, listen to the truth. We are not of the red city or of this land at all. We are men from outside the mountains."

"Lie upon lie!" snarled Lurain. "All men know that no living thing can cross those mountains, whose very touch is death. Though you wield strange weapons and wear strange garb, I know you are Thargo's dogs, seeking like your evil

master to do the thing unholy, to drink of the forbidden lake."

"The lake?" cried Clark Stannard, his heart leaping excitedly. "You mean the Lake of Life? Where does it lie? Is it in the red city?"

"You know well where the lake lies, blasphemer," said Lurain, staring in cold, bitter hate. "These many generations have you and your forebears sought to win to it and drink its forbidden waters."

"By heaven, the Lake of Life—some kind of lake at least—does exist here!" Clark told the others excitedly. "And this girl knows where. If we can find c it——"

Link Wilson's guns leaped suddenly into his hands. They all spun around. From the west, the sound of many galloping horses came to their ears. Lurain's blue eyes blazed in soaring hope.

"The men we routed must have come back with others!" Clark cried. "Quick, into the brush."

"Too late," twanged Ephraim Quell.

For these horsemen were already in sight of them, a full hundred, galloping in a solid troop from the direction of the crimson city. And these men wore *red* armor, instead of black. At first sight of them, the hope died in Lurain's face.

The Red horsemen dashed up and at a shouted order from their leader, split into a thin line that encircled Clark and his band. Then they sat their horses, their swords raised ominously.

"Shall we give it to them?" snarled Blacky.

"Not yet," Clark commanded swiftly. "There are too many of them for us to rout, this time. Wait—they're not attacking."

THE leader of the Red horsemen had dismounted and was approaching. He was a man of about thirty years, with a smooth white face and cunning eyes. As his gaze fell on the girl in Clark's grasp, exultation leaped into his eyes. Wonder and doubt replaced it as he stared at the grim, tense little band of six adventurers.

"Who be you, stranger?" he asked in the same vague Arabic tongue the girl had used. "You are not of our city of K'Lamm; that I know. Neither can you be of Dordona, or you would not have slain these Blacks that lie here."

"How do you know we killed them?"

"We know," said the Red leader firmly. "Guards on our city wall heard strange, sharp sounds from this spot and saw Black spies riding away in terror from you. That is why we came out to investigate.

"I am Dral, third captain in the army of the great king Thargo," he added. "Tell me, strangers, from whence came you? And how did you kill these Blacks, when you have no swords?"

"We come from beyond the mountains," Clark said in hard tones. "We killed the Blacks with the weapons in our hands."

Dral glanced at the pistols and his smile became mocking. "Truly, those do not look like weapons."

"Yet they are, and terrible ones," Clark said grimly. "Watch!"

A big, red-winged bird had just alighted on a near-by bush. Clark raised his pistol and fired. The bird fell to the ground.

At the report, Dral and his men recoiled, and the horses plunged and reared wildly. Dral's eyes were wide, not mocking now, when he came back to face Clark.

"Truly, they *are* weapons of power," he muttered, swift, inscrutable thoughts racing excitedly behind his eyes. Then with greatly increased respect in his manner, he informed Clark, "Thargo, king of K'Lamm, would welcome you, strangers,

Indeed, he would welcome anyone who captured for us, as you did, this wildcat daughter of our old enemy, Kimor."

His gaze flickered with hate toward Lurain's contemptuous face as he spoke. Clark did not like that look.

"We did not capture the girl for you or Thargo," Clark said sharply. "She is *our* prisoner, not yours."

"We could take her from you, strangers," said Dral, flushing in anger.

"Remember the bird that just died," Clark told him pointedly. "Are you sure you could take her from us?"

Again doubt and other stronger emotions struggled in Dral's cunning eyes. Clark could see clearly that the man was fearful of the pistols, but that he was utterly determined to take Lurain a prisoner to his lord. Presently he smiled and said smoothly:

"Be it so; the girl is your prisoner. Will you come with us—and your prisoner—into K'Lamm?"

It was Clark's turn to feel doubt. Somehow, he did not want to take the girl, snarling, fierce little tigress though she was, into the city of her deadly enemies. But he knew that he could not release her either, now that the Red warriors were on the scene.

As long as she was his prisoner, Clark felt, he could guard her safely. And he wanted very much to see this Thargo who ruled the crimson city K'Lamm. It seemed that his only hope of reaching the mysterious Lake of Life lay in the Red warriors.

"Will Thargo be willing to help me win to the Lake of Life?" he asked Dral bluntly.

Sudden triumph flashed into Dral's eyes at the question. But the Red captain said quickly:

"Thargo desires above all things to attain the shining waters of the lake. For ages, indeed, we of K'Lamm have sought to drink of those waters of immortality, and have only been prevented by the dogs of Blacks, the people of rotting Dordona."

"Aye," broke in Lurain fiercely, "and never will you blasphemers reach the sacred lake while one man is alive in Dordona. And even though we all die, the Guardians will keep you from it."

Clark began to understand. Dordona was the city of the Blacks, somewhere inside this giant crater. And the Lake of Life was either at or near Dordona, for the Blacks had apparently constituted themselves the defenders of the sacred waters.

That decided Clark. There was, obviously, no hope of reaching the lake by going to the Black city. And if these warriors of K'Lamm wanted the same thing as he did, to reach the lake, he would string along with them, for the time being, at least. Even though they too seemed to believe in the superstition that the lake's waters conferred immortality, they might make good allies.

"We go to K'Lamm with you," Clark told Dral curtly. "But remember—the girl is our own prisoner."

"It is so agreed, strangers," Dral said in quick assent, though his eyes hid a gleam.

He shouted an order, and horses were brought forward, their riders mounting behind other warriors. The girl's hands were bound and she was placed in the saddle in front of Clark Stannard.

LINK WILSON uttered a long sigh as he vaulted lightly into the queer, high-pommeled saddle of his mount.

"Sure feels good to fork a horse again," the lank Texan said, his eyes alight.

Clark told them briefly what had happened, and of his decision. Blacky Cain nodded his predatory face in agreement.

"Looks like we're heading into the

hangout of the local big-shot," the gangster rasped; "but what the hell—if he gets tough, we can always shoot our way out."

"Forward!" cried Dral.

With wild yells, the whole troop of Red warriors urged their horses forward. Clark and his five men rode in the van with Dral, heading straight west toward the crimson towers and roofs.

Lurain rode stiff and unbending in front of Clark, and the glimpses he got of her chiseled white face showed it proud, fierce and unwavering. The girl knew she was on the way into the stronghold of her bitterest enemies, but she showed no sign of fear. She might have been a queen riding to a triumph, so straight and proud she sat. Involuntary respect for the little wildcat stirred in Clark Stannard, even though he was still savagely angry at her merciless attempt to kill them.

Now they galloped, with thunder of thudding hoofs, the Red warriors bending eagerly forward in their saddles. Link Wilson rode like a centaur, the Texan drinking in the wind, his reckless face lit with pleasure. Blacky Cain rode joltingly with harsh face fixed on the city ahead, and Quell and Mike Shinn and Lieutenant Morrow were behind.

Full before them in the dying blaze of the red sunset lay the great Red City, crimson roofs and domes and walls standing out in blinding, blood-like splendor. Gardens and pasturing herds lay outside its walls. Somewhere in here, Clark thought, was Thargo, the king who desired like himself to attain to the mysterious Lake of Life. He must be careful—careful!

Then they were right to the city, thundering in a rushing troop through its wide-open red metal gates, the hooves of their steeds clashing now on a red stone pavement, riding with their prisoner and their fierce escort, right into the crimson city K'Lamm.

The strange mystery of the Lake of Life, and of the Red and Black cities, will be described in the swift-moving chapters of this story that will appear in next month's issue of WEIRD TALES. Reserve your copy at your magazine dealer's now.

Night of Unrest

By ROBERT NELSON

I tore a mask from off a trull,
  And plucked a lotus drenched with blood;
  I threw them to the wrathful flood,
And kissed and wooed a lonely skull.

Satan's Palimpsest

By SEABURY QUINN

Weird was the doom and evil was the influence that emanated from that mosaic picture on the wall—a startling thrill-tale of Jules de Grandin, ghost-breaker extraordinary

IT WAS a merry though oddly assorted party Philip Classon entertained at Saint's Rest, his big house beside the Shrewsbury: a motion-picture star, a playwright quietly and industriously drinking himself to death, one or two bankers, a lawyer, several unattached ladies living comfortably on their dower or their alimony, Jules de Grandin and me. Dinner had been perfect, with turtle soup, filet of lemon sole in sauce bercy, Canada grouse and an assortment of wines which caused my little friend's blue eyes to sparkle with appreciation. Now, as he sat with Karen Kirsten on the big divan before the roaring fire of apple logs and sipped his Jérôme Napoléon from a lotus-bud shaped brandy sniffer, he was obviously at peace with all the world.

"Mais certainement, ma belle," I heard him tell the actress in an interval between the efforts of the duet at the piano to retail the nostalgic longings of the old cowhand from the Rio Grande, "it is indubitably a fact. Thoughts are things. We may not see or handle them, nor can we weigh them in a balance, but they have a certain substance of their own. They can penetrate, they can permeate the hardest matter, and like the rose-scent in Monsieur Moore's poem, they will cling to it when it is all but worn away by time or smashed by violence."

"Sure of that, are you, de Grandin?" our host asked quizzically as he leant across the sofa back and rested one hand on the little Frenchman's black-clad shoulder, the other on the actress' gleaming arm.

"As sure as one can be of anything—only fools are positive," de Grandin answered with a smile.

"You're certain?"

"Positive, *parbleu!*"

As the laughter died away Classon nodded toward the curtained doorway. "We've a chance to test Doctor de Grandin's theory," he announced. "There's something in the gunroom I'd like to show you and see what effect it has."

Amid murmurs of mystified conjecture he led the way across the wide hall lit by a pair of swinging boat-shaped lamps which gave that odd, pale light that comes only from burning olive oil, swept aside the heavy Turkish hangings at the door and motioned us to enter.

The "gunroom" was a relic of the days when New Jersey had no need of conservation laws for game, and the fowling-piece and rifle were as much a source of daily meat as were the meadow, the pig-sty and the poultry yard. An ancestor of Classon's who built ships when Yankee mariners dropped anchor in every port from Bombay to Southampton had built Saint's Rest as sturdily as he built his craft, and though slaves' quarters and summer kitchens had long been turned to modern usages, like the gunrooms they still retained their ancient designations.

It was a lovely place. There was a walnut table of Italian make surely not a year younger than the Fifteenth Cen-

tury, French rosewood chairs upholstered in brocade which must have been worth its measurement in gold, a lacquered Chinese cabinet dating from the days when the Son of Heaven bore the surname Han; across one wall was hung a lovely verdure tapestry from Sixteenth Century Flanders depicting decidedly naughty *al-fresco* goings-on with the same lack of restraint as that displayed by that amazing little mannikin in Brussels which every year decants champagne with utter unconventionality.

With a taper Classon lit two oil-dish lamps—the house was wired for electricity, but I'd seen nothing thus far but the light of lamps and candles—and directed our attention to a white-wood table

"Adonis, that pale, lovely boy."

like an altar which stood just within their zone of radiance. "This is it," he told us, and it seemed to me there was a sharp intake of breath, almost like a sigh of pain, as he made the brusk announcement.

Something like the tabernacle of a Catholic altar showed aureately in the lamplight. Two feet in height by eighteen inches wide, pointed like a Gothic arch, plain and unadorned with ornament as a siege gun's shell, its dull mat gold shone dimly in the mounting luminance cast by the gently swaying lamps.

"What is it? Is it a——" the querying babble started, but Classon raised his hand.

"This is just the frame," he answered. "Look."

He pressed a hidden spring and twin doors sprang apart, revealing three pictures integrated into one, all worked in deft mosaic. On the inside of the left-hand door there ranged a group of dancing youths and maidens clad in the chiton of the classic Greeks as modified for use in Constantine's Byzantium. The other panel bore a group of creeping children, nude and chubby with the chubbiness so dearly loved by early artists, while in the center, deep-set between the back-flung doors, there stood a slender, pale ascetic figure with a clout of camel's hair about his loins, rough sandals on his feet and a cross-topped staff in his right hand. The ancient artist had worked cunningly, so cunningly that the tiny lines between the variegated-colored marble were finer than the minute crevices in Chinese crackle-wear, and no detail of the groups or portrait had been lost. The saint's blue eyes, wide, deep and extraordinarily sad, seemed to look into our own with a searching, deep intensity, as though to chide us for the worldliness that lay within our hearts and say: "Behold these dancing youths, these creeping, puling babes; the babes grow into youth and maidenhood and have their hour of silly pleasure, then comes old age and death and dissolution. Vanity, vanity; all is vanity!"

"Well?" Classon asked when we had gazed upon the ikon for a long moment in silence. "What d'ye see?"

"A sacred picture."—"Beautiful!"—"Exquisite!"—"Sweet!"—"Divine!"—"Superb!"—"Swell!"

The fatuous comments fluttered thick as snowflakes, phrased according to the speaker's wealth or paucity of diction.

"Yes, of course, but what d'ye *see?* What's the picture of?"

"A saint?" I hazarded when no one else seemed willing to express conjecture.

"That's what you all see?" asked Classon, and it seemed to me there was an eagerness about his question and an air of quick relief entirely unwarranted by the triviality of the entire business.

I was turning to examine the Chinese cabinet when de Grandin's hand upon my elbow brought me round.

"Observe her, if you will, Friend Trowbridge," he commanded, motioning toward Karen Kirsten with his eyes.

She had not replied to Classon's questions nor expressed opinion of the ikon's artistry, I realized, but I was unprepared for what I saw. She was standing looking at the triple picture, head thrown back, hands hanging limply open at her sides. The lamplight played across her, accentuating her unusual beauty in a way no cameraman had ever managed. Tall she was, almost six feet, and every line of her was long, but definitely feminine. Her hair, like silver-silken filaments, was smoothed and plaited in long braids about her head; her dazzling fairness was set off by a slim gown of apple-green baghera draped in Grecian fashion; there were bracelets of carved gold upon her

arms and a strand of pearls about her throat, and I caught my breath in sudden wonder, for lustrous pearls and lucent skin almost exactly matched each other. Her ice-blue Nordic eyes habitually held the commanding look which is the heritage of Northern races, but now there was another, different look in them. The pupils seemed to spread until they stained the blue irides black; I could see fear stealing into them, stark, abysmal fear which radiated from a sickened heart and was mirrored in her eyes.

"All right, folks," Classon's brusk announcement broke the spell; "that's all there is. Let's go back and have another drink."

"But why did you insist we tell you what we saw, Phil?" asked Mrs. Durstin as we reassembled in the drawing-room. "It's just an ordinary lovely piece of mosaic, isn't it?"

Classon laughed shamefacedly. "Just a gag, Clara," he assured her. "Didn't you ever notice how the average person can be bullied out of sticking to the evidence of his own senses? Why, I've had people here who declared they saw all sorts of things—even swore they saw the figures move—when I kept asking 'em what they saw in those pictures. Seems as if this is a pretty level-headed crowd, though; I didn't have a bit of luck with you."

The evening passed with a surprizing variety of liquid refreshment, some passable singing, much ultra-modernistic dancing and a number of stories, some of which were funny and risqué, some merely ribald. By midnight I had managed to convince myself that the vision of Miss Kirsten's terror in the gunroom had been due to some illness which had stricken her—any doctor knows what changes indigestion-pangs can work in patients' faces—and dismissed the recollection from my mind.

But as we paused to say good-night beside the stairs, Miss Kirsten laid her hand upon my arm.

"You and Doctor de Grandin drove down from Harrisonville, didn't you, Doctor Trowbridge?" she asked, and again I saw that flicker of stark terror in her eyes.

"Yes," I answered.

"How long are you staying?"

"Only to breakfast, unfortunately. I should have liked the opportunity of talking more with you, but——"

"Won't you take me with you, please?" she broke in on my clumsy gallantry. "There isn't any train till noon tomorrow, and I've been going utterly mad in this house all day. I must get away as quickly as I can. I must—*I must!*"

"Why, certainly," I soothed. "Doctor de Grandin and I shall be pleased to have you with us on the homeward drive."

"Oh"—her long, slim, delicately articulated fingers closed upon my arm with a grip of surprizing strength—"thank you, Doctor!"

She made me the offer of a grateful, half-frightened smile, lit her candle from the lamp of hammered bronze which burned upon the table by the newel post, and turned to mount the stairs.

ARRAYED in violet-silk pajamas and mauve dressing-gown, de Grandin stood before the window of our bedroom, looking out upon the snow-flecked darkness of the winter night as if he sought to light it with something burning in his mind.

"What's the matter, old fellow?" I asked, smothering a yawn as I made for the bathroom, tooth-brush in hand.

"I wonder," he returned without taking his meditative gaze from the black square of the window, "I ponder, I cogitate; there is a black dog running through my brain."

"Eh?" I shot back. "A black——"

"*Précisément.* An exceedingly troublesome and active small black poodle, my friend. Why?"

"I don't think that I follow——"

"*Ah bah,* you are literal as a platter of boiled codfish! When I ask why, I mean why. Why, by example, does our friend Classon want to have the testimony of his guests that that ikon in his gunroom is but the pretty picture of some dancing children and some creeping babes who act as foils for an ascetic saint? Why is he relieved when they tell him what they see. Why——"

"Didn't you hear what he told Mrs. Durstin?" I broke in. "It's some silly sort of game he played; he wanted to see if he could bully us into thinking that we saw——"

"What he has seen, maybe?"

"What *he* saw? Why, what could he see that we couldn't?"

"That which Mademoiselle Kirsten saw, perhaps."

"See here," I dropped into the armchair by the fire and felt for my cigarcase, "all this mystery has me slowly going crazy. Classon didn't seem in any jocose mood when he asked us what we saw while looking at that picture. Indeed, it seemed to me that he was definitely frightened, and when we told him that we saw the picture of a saint he seemed relieved, yet a little disappointed, too.

"Then take Karen Kirsten. I can't understand her. She's more like Brunhilde than Griselda; I'd say she never was afraid of anything. Twelve hundred years ago women like her swung double-bladed axes and tugged twenty-foot oars beside their men, and spat back curses and defiance in the face of god and devil; yet if that woman wasn't absolutely mad with horror of some sort—if she isn't hag-ridden and almost wild to leave this house this very minute—I never saw terror in a human face. Have you any idea what it's all about?"

He turned from the window and tore the blue wrapping from a packet of "Marylands," selected one of the evil-smelling things with infinite care and set it alight. "Not an idea, my friend, merely a thought; one of those vague, elusive thoughts that fade like dewdrops in the sun when you seek to put them into words. But——" He shook his head impatiently, as though to clear his brain, then recommenced:

"You saw the composition of those pictures, how they are constructed of cleverly matched bits of colored stone. Very good. Between the little colored fragments are tiny, so small lines, *n'est-ce-pas?*"

"Of course, it's a mosaic——"

"*Bien.* It was only for a moment, for the fraction of the twinkling of an eye, but as I looked upon those pictures I thought the colored marbles ran together, separated, turned about one another like the bright glass of a kaleidoscope and formed a different pattern. It was over quickly, *parbleu,* so quickly that it could hardly have been said to have occurred, but——" He paused and puffed reflectively at his cigarette, letting twin rivulets of smoke trickle slowly from his nostrils.

"What was it that you saw?"

"*Mordieu,* that is what taunts me. I cannot say. So quickly it came, so fast it disappeared that I had not time to realize it. But I am certain that it was an evil, an obscene and wicked thing I saw, like a monkey dancing on a consecrated altar."

"But that's absurd."

"The line of demarkation that divides absurdity from horror is often very finely drawn, my friend." For a moment he stared straight before him, and his little round blue eyes seemed misted, as though,

still open, they shut out vision while he racked his inner consciousness for an answer to the riddle. Abruptly: "Come, let us go and look at it," he bade. "It may be in the quiet of the empty room we shall be able to congeal and hold that fleeting metamorphosis which mocked me when we stood there with the others."

We tiptoed toward the stairs, but hardly had we gone ten feet when his hand upon my arm brought me to a halt. In the dim light cast by a single swinging oil lamp someone was coming from the floor below, someone who walked in silence and whose presence we should not have realized had it not been for the shadow cast across the stairhead.

"Back into this doorway if you please, my friend," de Grandin whispered, and as we shrank into the recess of the deep-set door Karen Kirsten glided up the stairs, paused a moment with one hand upon the baluster and threw back her head with up-turned eyes as though imploring mercy from kind Providence. She was tense as a drawn harp-string, and her face was set in lines of suffering, but the faint light seeping up the stair-well from behind her rippled through her golden hair and cast shadows on her brows which seemed to deepen the cerulean of her eyes. In her sleeveless, neckless nightrobe of white crêpe, with a slender hand laid humbly on her heaving bosom, it seemed to me she bore a likeness to the pictures of Saint Barbara.

"Ah, God!" she breathed in a high, quivering sigh. "God have pity!"

Filled with compassion I took a half-step toward her, but the sudden pressure of de Grandin's small hand on my elbow halted me.

"Observe," he breathed—*"le sang!"*

I felt a retching wave of sickness as he spoke. Across the bodice of her nightdress where her slender hand had rested, was a dark, rubescent stain.

FOR an endless moment we three, watched and watchers, stood in statue-like stillness; then with another sobbing sigh the woman turned and glided down the hall, her white, bare feet as soundless as a zephyr on the polished boards.

"Wh—what can have happened?" I faltered, but his only answer was to urge me toward the stairs.

The pale glow of a single lamp burning like a vigil light above the altar-table where the ikon stood shone through the gunroom as we entered. At a glance I saw the little doors were open and the triple picture on display, but before de Grandin's quickly indrawn breath had sounded I had also seen the thing that lay before the table on the floor.

It was—it had been—Wyndham Farraday, the dissolute young playwright, and a single glance assured us he was dead. His head lay back, and in the staring, sunken eyes, pinched nose, drooping jaw and idiotically half-protruding tongue we read the signs that to the practised eye are unmistakable. He lay upon his back with arms thrown out to right and left as though he had been crucified upon the hardwood floor, and from the left breast of his pajama jacket thrust the gilded cross-shaped handle of a slender dagger, a mediæval misericord, thin as a darning-needle, pointed as a bee-sting, designed to slip between the links of fine chain-mail and deal the death blow where a larger weapon would have failed. A little sluggish stream of blood had stained his jacket round the knife-wound. He was not handsome or majestic as he lay there with the chill of *rigor mortis* even then beginning to congeal his loose-hung lower jaw. Poets and romantic writers to the contrary, there is little dignity or beauty in raw death, as every soldier, doctor and embalmer knows. The majesty of death is largely artificial.

"Do you think she——" I began, but

de Grandin's sudden exclamation broke my words.

"*L'idole*—the picture, my friend—observe her, if you please!" he breathed.

I looked, then blinked my eyes in wondering disbelief. The little bits of colored marble which composed the triple picture seemed sliding past, around and *through* one another with a bewildering kaleidoscopic motion, losing their old pattern, making vague, unformed designs upon their golden background, then rearranging themselves in new and terrifying groupings. It was hard—impossible—to say what scenes they formed, but I felt a wave of nausea sweeping over me, a physical sickness such as that I felt when as a young interne I had been assigned to duty at the city morgue and for the first time smelled the fulsome odor of decaying human flesh.

Then sanity returned. The lamp! It was swaying pendulum-like above the ikon. That was it; the changing light and shadow as the light swung back and forth had caused an optical illusion. I took the boat-shaped bowl of burnished copper in my hands and steadied it. When I looked again the pictures had resumed their lovely wont. The youths and maidens once again danced joyously upon the tender, blue-green grass against a background of fresh-budding willows; the chubby cooing infants rolled and sported on a flowering sward; the pale, ascetic saint looked out with admonition and reproach upon a world which wooed the pomps and pleasures of the carnal life.

"Oh thou empty-headed zany, thou species of an elephant, thou—oh, *le bon Dieu* give me patience with this witless one!" de Grandin fairly chattered, his round blue eyes ablaze with indignation, his small hands twitching to close round my throat.

"Why, what's the matter now?" I asked. "That swaying lamp obscured our vision; we'll need a steady light to see——"

"If kindly Providence will defend me from my well-intentioned friends, I think that I can guard against my enemies!" he broke in sharply, looking at me with a heaven-grant-me-fortitude expression. "In your attempt at helpfulness you have blocked the path of justice, human and divine. That swinging lamp was not set in motion by itself, *par consequent* it must have started swaying by some outside force. I would make bold to venture that some human hand had touched it in the recent past, for it was still in motion when we came here. Accordingly, there were unquestionably finger-prints upon it. Whose? *Hélas,* that we shall never know. You must needs stop the light from swinging because it made you see things which were not there to see—and left your great and ugly paw-prints on it in the process. Twenty expert tracers cannot now find the prints which were left there by the person who had touched that lamp a little while before. And that person, I damn think, was none other than the murderer of this poor one.

"Also, the distortion of this picture, as you call it, which you have attributed to the swaying of that lamp, may be the very crux of all this cursèd mystery. Why was Monsieur Classon anxious to have the testimony of his guests that this pretty picture was nothing but a pretty picture? Because, I think, he had seen it show another scene, *pardieu!* Why did la Kirsten show such signs of fear when she looked upon this seventy-times-damned ikon? Because she saw a something which was not good to see while the others saw but pretty figures! Why did Jules de Grandin have impressions of some sacrilegious scene when first he looked upon this piece of what seems

innocent mosaic? Because I am attuned to superphysical appearances; I see deeper into such things than the ordinary man. Finally, why did you look sick, as if your dinner had most vilely disagreed with you, when you looked at this cursèd picture but a moment since? Because you, too, saw something dreadful taking shape. A moment more and we had captured it—but you must be helpful and dispel the atmosphere of evil which was gathering thick as fog.

"And now you ask me what's the matter! You should abase yourself. You should repent in sackcloth; you should walk barefoot through the snow; you should abstain from liquor for a week, *parbleu!*

"No matter," he put aside annoyance with true French practicality and turned toward the door. "This is now a matter for police investigation. Let us telephone the state constabulary."

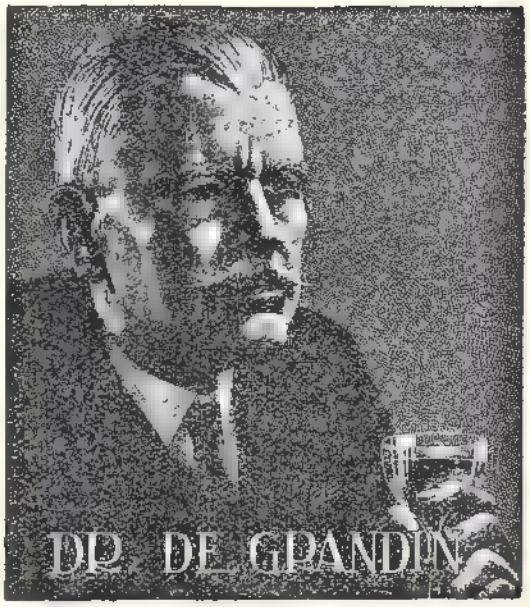
"THIS is positively the most uncanny business I've ever seen," Captain Chenevert of the State Police informed us.

De Grandin eyed him saturninely. "You are informing me, *mon capitaine?*"

"I certainly am. Look here: We've checked and double-checked that room for finger-prints, and what do we find? Nothing. Not a thing!"

"Nothing?"

"Well, practically. Or, rather, something worse. There are plain and unmistakable prints on the dagger handle, but they're Wyndham Farraday's. Now, that just doesn't make sense. Farraday might have stabbed himself through the heart, though this job's so neatly done it almost seems as if a surgeon did it; but if he did it himself one of two things would have followed the infliction of the wound. Either he'd have staggered forward and fallen in a heap, probably on



his side, or he'd have collapsed at once; in which case he would either have fallen face-forward or dropped upon his back with his legs partly doubled under him. Possibly—though this usually happens in cases of shooting through the brain—he'd have been seized with a cadaveric spasm, all his muscles would have tightened into knots, and his fingers would have closed round the dagger-hilt in an almost unbreakable grip."

He paused and looked at Jules de Grandin questioningly. "Do you agree?"

"Perfectly, *mon capitaine;* you have exhausted the possibilities of the situation from a scientific standpoint."

"Then why in blazing hell was he lying so neatly spread out on the floor with his heels together like a soldier at attention and his arms flung out at right angles to his body?"

"Mightn't someone wearing gloves have stabbed him after he'd had the dagger in his hand?" I hazarded; but:

"Not a chance!" Chenevert smiled bleakly. "We've considered that, but if it had been done that way Farraday's finger-prints would have been practically

obliterated, or at least smudged to some extent. They're not; they're clean and clear as any I've ever seen. This thing's got me going nutty. The finger-prints say 'suicide' with a capital S; all collateral evidence points to murder. If such a thing weren't palpably absurd here, I'd say it looked like *hari-kari*—ritual suicide with the assistance of a second party, you know. I saw a case of it in Kobe some years ago. A man had disemboweled himself in the approved Japanese manner, but the friend who acted as his second had waited to compose his limbs so that he lay as peacefully as Wyndham Farraday, though he must have threshed around terribly during the death agony."

Suddenly I saw it all. Karen Kirsten's frenzy to get away, her terror when she entered the gunroom last night, the blood on her nightgown when we saw her in the upper hall! It had been a suicide pact, and the woman lost her courage at the last. "By George," I exclaimed, "Miss——"

The kick de Grandin gave me underneath the table nearly broke my tibia, but it had the desired effect. "Mistakes like that are easy to make in such cases," I ended lamely as Chenevert cast a questioning look at me.

"Friend Trowbridge has the right of it," de Grandin nodded. "There are many angles to this case, my captain; the trail is long and winding, and involved. Perhaps it would be well to lay the household under interdict."

"Eh? Inter——"

"Perfectly. Until the guilty party is arrested or the case marked permanently unsolved, every person in the building is suspect. People have a way of disappearing, my captain, once they leave the jurisdiction. While all of us are here you can put the finger on us at convenience. Once we are scattered——"

"I gotcha," Chenevert laughed. "You bet I'll put the clamp on, Doctor. Can't hold 'em here indefinitely, but I'll post a couple of the boys here with orders not to let anybody leave for thirty-six hours. We should know where we stand by that time. Meantime," he wound his muffler round his neck and buttoned up his short coat, "there's the body to dispose of and reports to be prepared. Call me at the barracks if anything comes up. I'll be over again sometime this afternoon."

"OH, THIS is terrible!" Karen Kirsten wailed when we told her the police had forbidden us to leave. "I have shopping to do in New York, and my lawyers to consult about a new contract. I have to take a plane for the Coast immediately!" Her blue eyes blazed and her long hands folded and unfolded as she strode across the floor with her characteristic long-limbed, effortless walk. "I can't—I won't be cooped up in this dreadful place another minute, I tell you!"

True to the traditions of her trade, she was working herself into a temperamental tantrum, but beneath de Grandin's level stare she calmed amazingly.

"It would be better if we told ourselves the truth without reservation of any sort, *Mademoiselle,*" he spoke in a level, almost toneless voice. "We are your friends; moreover, our experience has taught us to give credence to many things which the ordinary man would brush aside as nonsense. Nevertheless, we cannot help you if you are not frank."

"Why shouldn't I be frank?" she blazed. "I've nothing to hide. I know nothing of this dreadful business."

"You did not know that Monsieur Farraday was dead until they told you?"

"Of course not!"

"Not even when you left your room at dead of night and crept mouse-quiet

to the gunroom where he lay like one crucified before that so queer ikon?"

"What do you mean? I never left my room last night——"

"*Mademoiselle,*" he interrupted harshly, "you are lying. It was Doctor Trowbridge and I who notified the police of Monsieur Farraday's death when we stumbled on his body in the gunroom. As we were about to leave our room we saw you coming up the stairs, we saw the agitation under which you labored, we saw the blood upon your *robe de nuit.* We have not spoken of this, *Mademoiselle,* for there are some things best left unsaid, for the present, at any rate; but if you persist in this pretense of ignorance—if you will not help us to help you"—he spread his hands and raised his shoulders, brows and elbows in a shrug —"*eh bien,* it is a crime to withhold information from the officers, *Mademoiselle.* You would not have us become criminals, surely?"

She went absolutely rigid. There had never been much natural color in her cheeks; now they were positively corpse-gray. And her eyes were terrible in their fixed stare.

"You mean you saw me come upstairs last night?" she whispered. Her words were so low that we could scarcely hear them, her voice flat, expressionless, almost mechanical.

"Perfectly, *Mademoiselle.*" The ghost of a hard smile curved the lips beneath the trimly waxed wheat-blond mustache.

Surrender showed in the sudden drooping of her shoulders, in the lines of weariness that suddenly etched themselves in her carefully-tended face.

"Very well," she answered in a voice dull with fatigue, "I was there; I saw him—found him huddled up before the altar where that dreadful picture stands. He seemed so young, so helpless, lying there like that. I composed his limbs"—her blue eyes filled with tears and her firm chin quivered with unbidden sobs—"I stretched his arms out, too. It was a dreadful thing he'd done; it's terrible to kill yourself, and I thought that if I stretched his arms out like a cross it might help him plead for pardon——"

"That was the *only* reason you arranged him so, *Mademoiselle?*" Again the flicker of a disbelieving smile showed upon his mobile lips.

"Oh"—the woman turned on him, her eyes gone flat with fright—"you're dreadful, uncanny, devilish! No, if you must have the truth! I stretched his arms out like a cross because I was afraid. There's an old belief in Sweden that the dead ride hard, that suicides are lonely on their way through hell, and come back to the world to look for company; but if you lay a cross across their path, their way back to this world is barred. They can't come at you, then. We forget these things in practical America, but Death's not practical; it's as old and terrible as Odin's raven or the Storm Sisters; it brings back thoughts of olden days, so——"

"Precisely, *Mademoiselle,* one understands. Now tell us, if you please, what made you seek the gunroom in the first place?"

"Give me a cigarette," she begged, and he held his open case before her, then held his lighter forward. As she touched her cigarette tip to the fire she looked at him across the tiny flame that gleamed its echo fascinatingly in her brilliant eyes.

"I've had devils ever since I came here," she told us. Her voice was slurred and languorous, almost somnolent, yet strangely mechanical, as though an unseen hand played a gramophone on which her words had been recorded. "I don't know what it was; ordinarily I'm not subject to nerves, even when I'm

tired, but something in the very atmosphere of this house seemed to frighten me. Perhaps it was the eery half-light the place has even in the day, maybe the lamplight, so different from the bright glow of electricity to which I'm used. At any rate, I had the creeps from the moment I crossed the threshold; everywhere I went I seemed to feel eyes, dozens of pairs of eyes—evil, wicked, calculating eyes—boring right into my brain from behind. I'd turn around a dozen times in the process of crossing the room to see if someone really were staring at me, but it was no use, the eyes were quicker. No matter how fast I'd turn they'd get around behind me, and keep staring—*leering*—at me from the back."

She ground the fire of her cigarette out against the bottom of an ash-tray. "Last year I visited a psycho-analyst in Hollywood, and he hypnotized me. I can remember how I fought against it just as I was going off to sleep. I kept shrieking to myself inside my brain: 'No, no; I won't give up my consciousness; I won't let this man inside my secret soul!' but by that time it had gone too far, and I fell asleep despite myself. That's how it was here. Someone—some *thing*—seemed trying to creep inside my brain; to steal my mind—no, not quite that, rather, to crowd it out. I could feel the force of impact of an alien presence trying steadily to get inside me, and just as I fought against the hypnotist, so I fought against this threat here at Saint's Rest. Only this time I was prepared; I was warned against the attack in time; I felt the subtle influence that probed and clawed and dug at my integrity. And I fought it—*Gud,* how I fought it!

"It was through Wyndham Farraday that I met Mr. Classon. I'd known Wyndham out on the Coast when he was doing some writing for Cosmic Films, and looked him up when I came East. He told me of a friend of his who had this wonderful old house filled with the most astonishing old relics, and said the pride of the collection was a reliquary brought from Constantinople when the Crusaders under Baldwin sacked it in 1204.

"I love old things. I've spent a fortune on them for my house in Beverly, and the thought of something like this fascinated me. Wyndham wanted Mr. Classon to take me to the gunroom right away, but he put us off with first one excuse and then another. We didn't go in till he took the others to see it after dinner last night, and by that time I was almost frantic. I felt that if only I could get away from this awful place I'd have nothing more to ask.

"The moment Mr. Classon took us in to see the ikon *I knew.* There, I realized, was the spider that sat in the center of the dreadful web which was entangling me. A spider—ugh! Spiders suck their victims' blood, I'm told, and just so this —this *thing*—had been sucking at my soul and sanity. I looked at the horrible, lovely thing with the same feeling of repulsion I'd have felt while looking at some beautiful venomous reptile in its cage. Only this thing wasn't caged. It was loose, and nothing stood between it and me. Then, as I looked, the colored stones in the mosaics all seemed to melt and run together, and form a sort of toneless gray. It seemed as though there were dull, lead-colored mirrors in the golden frames, and as I looked in them other pictures seemed to form. The dancing youths and maidens seemed to age before my eyes till they were dreadful dotards and hags, the little babies seemed to swell and puff to monstrous parodies of human children. The saint ——" her voice trailed off and her eyes

became lack-luster, dead as painted eyes in a wooden statue's painted face.

"Yes, *Mademoiselle?*" de Grandin prompted softly.

"I—don't—remember," she said softly. "It was something terrible, some dreadful transformation that shook me like a chill, but I can't describe it."

"One appreciates your difficulty," the little Frenchman murmured. "And then?"

"Like a voice in a dream I heard Mr. Classon telling us to go back to the drawing-room, and it seemed to awaken me from a sort of trance I'd fallen into. I drank more than I should last night, but if I could get drunk, I thought, I might be able to escape the memory of those frightful figures in the pictures. Finally, when we said good-night, I asked Doctor Trowbridge if I might ride up with you this morning.

"I couldn't sleep. The recollection of the things I'd seen—all the more terrifying because I couldn't recall them clearly—kept torturing me, and I made up my mind to go down to the gunroom and have another look at the reliquary."

A faint smile raised the drooping corners of her mouth, and she looked at us diffidently, as though she begged for understanding.

"When I was a little girl we had a picture-book that scared me dreadfully. It was the story of Strongheart and the Dragon, and I'd feel my breath all hot and sulfurous in my throat when I looked at some of the illustrations. But I kept going back to it. I'd creep into the library, take it down from its shelf and, beginning at the first page, slowly turn the pages back, leaf by leaf, till I came at last to the picture showing Strongheart grappling with the Monster. 'It won't frighten you so much this time, you're getting used to it,' I'd tell myself as I came nearer and nearer to the terrifying picture. But it always did. When at last I'd turned the final leaf and saw the awful, scaly thing with protruding, fiery eyes and forked red tongue and clutching claws staring at me, I'd seem to suffocate again, and run shrieking from the library to hide my face in Mother's apron.

"It was like that last night. I knew I'd be frightened almost past endurance if I looked at the ikon again, but I couldn't resist the morbid urge to go downstairs. Finally I gave up the struggle and crept down, fighting with myself at every step, and losing the contest at each stride. I was fairly running when I reached the lower hall.

"A light was burning in the gunroom, and it must have been set going recently, for the lamp was still swaying like a pendulum when I entered. I started for the picture, but before I reached it my foot struck something, and when I looked down there was poor Wyndham lying dead before me. I tried to scream, but the breath seemed to stick in my throat. I just stood there trembling, and in my brain a thought kept pounding: 'The picture made him do it—the picture made him do it!' "

"You say you knew he did it. One does not doubt your intuition, but how were you certain it was suicide, *Mademoiselle?*"

"Because there was a smear of blood on the heel of his hand, as if it had spurted out when he drove the dagger through his heart. If someone else had stabbed him he'd have thrown his hand up to his heart or tried to pluck the dagger out; the blood would have been on his palm or on his fingers."

"*Bravo,* an excellent deduction. And then——"

"I wiped the blood off his poor hand and wiped my own hands on my nightdress, then composed his limbs and laid him like a cross to bar his wandering spirit if it came back seeking company.

Then I crept back upstairs without stopping even to extinguish the lamp."

An agony of entreaty was in her face, and she clasped her hands imploringly, not theatrically, but instinctively, as she begged: "Please, please believe me. I've told you nothing but the truth. You don't think that I murdered Wyndham, do you?"

"We believe you utterly, *Mademoiselle,*" de Grandin answered. "But what the police would think is something else again. It would be better if we kept our counsel, we three, and said nothing till we have had time to think."

"Now what?" I asked as we closed our interview with Karen Kirsten.

"I think that I should like a word or several with Monsieur Classon," he replied. "His anxiety to test his guests' reactions to that *sacré* picture was founded on no idle whim, my friend; there is something much decidedly more than meets the naked eye in all this business of the monkey, or I am vastly more mistaken than I think. Yes, of course."

But Philip Classon was nowhere to be found. We sought him in the drawing-room, the library, the little combination office and retreat which he had made above the ancient carriage house. Finally, all other places failing, we ventured to the gunroom. The night before we had observed that only a heavy Turkish tapestry closed off the gunroom from the wide central hall. Now, as we put the drapery back, we found our passage barred by a heavy sliding door which had been drawn and locked.

"Sang du diable!" de Grandin muttered when neither repeated knockings nor calls could elicit a response; "this is more than merely strange! He cannot have gone out, the police will not permit that any leave the premises without a pass from Captain Chenevert; he is not in any of the other rooms; *alors,* he is in there. But who would go into that devil-haunted place, and why does he persist in keeping silent? *Parbleu,* but I should like to tweak him by the nose."

"Perhaps he doesn't want to be disturbed," I ventured. "Events of the last twelve hours have been enough to make him worry. If——"

"If he does not answer our next summons I shall force the door," the little Frenchman interrupted. "I do not trust that gunroom, me. No, it is an evil place, the very temple of the evil genius which has haunted Mademoiselle Kirsten since she came here. *Holà,* Monsieur Classon, are you within? We have important matters to discuss!"

Utter silence answered him and with a sigh of vexation he went to seek the trooper who stood guard at the front door.

The young state constable was diffident. His orders were to watch the house and see that no one left. Regulations forbade the injury of private property unless a crime had been committed.

"Morbleu, a crime will be committed, that of assault and battery, if you refuse us aid," the little Frenchman blazed. "Am I not in charge here in Captain Chenevert's absence? But certainly. Are not *Monsieur le Capitaine* and I close friends, boon companions? Indubitably. Have we not been drunk together? It is entirely so. Break in the door, *mon vieux;* I will shoulder full responsibility."

Whoever built that door had understood his business, for it was not until de Grandin had added his weight to the stalwart young trooper's that the lock gave way and the heavy oaken panels slid aside.

"Good heavens!" I exclaimed as the gunroom stood revealed.

"Well, I'll be damned!" the trooper swore.

"*Dieu de Dieu de Dieu de Dieu!*" said Jules de Grandin.

No lamp was burning in the room, and the heavy, rep-bound curtains had been drawn across the windows to shut out the howling storm, but enough light filtered through to make large objects visible. Almost in the selfsame spot where Wyndham Farraday had stretched out cruciform in death something half leant, half knelt in the gloom, its outlines proclaiming it a man, but its attitude terrifyingly inhuman.

It was—or rather had been—Philip Classon, and he leant obliquely forward with half-bent knees and dangling hands that almost touched the floor, and head bent oddly sidewise, mouth partly opened to permit a quarter-inch of livid, blood-empurpled tongue to find escape between the teeth displayed by curled-back upper lip and limply hanging, flaccid lower jaw. A strand of knotted rope was round his neck, its upper end made fast to the bronze ringbolt which secured the hanging lamp. The rope had been too long and Classon too tall to permit conventional suicide. It had been necessary for him to lean, almost kneel, in order to secure sufficient downward drag to strangle himself. Any time within the first few seconds after dropping forward he could have saved himself by merely standing upright, but unconsciousness follows swiftly on compression of the great blood-vessels of the neck. . . . He was grotesque but placid. There had been no death agony.

De Grandin and I were regaling ourselves with black coffee liberally flavored with araq when Captain Chenevert stormed in after battling fifteen miles of snow-blocked roads.

"Another one?" he shouted angrily. "In the same room—within twelve hours? God A'mighty, this thing's gettin' to be a habit!"

Functionaries filled the house with utter chaos the remainder of the day. Photographers and finger-print experts from the police barracks; a sheriff's deputy, not quite clear as to either functions, rights or duties, but officiously anxious to impress us and the cynically polite state troopers with his own importance; the coroner, who being also the neighborhood mortician was wrung between the necessity of appearing appropriately grave and the difficultly suppressed delight at acquiring two cases from the same house in a single day. Finally the coroner's physician, a superannuated quack whose knowledge of post-mortem phenomena of suicide was plainly inferior to the state policemen's expert training. But at last the grisly business finished, and Classon left his house feet-first upon a stretcher, his mortality concealed but not disguised beneath a not-too-fresh white sheet.

Dinner was a dismal rite, its only spot of color Karen Kirsten's golden hair and vivid, scarlet lips. No one strove for conversation, no one had much appetite for food, but when we went into the drawing-room for coffee and liqueurs the appetite for alcohol was something more than obvious. By nine o'clock the women were thick-tongued and maudlin, the men sunk in the utter taciturnity of saturnine intoxication.

Karen Kirsten left us early, pleading headache, and de Grandin and I followed her as quickly as we could. There was too much of the solemnity and none of the jollity of a wake about that dim-lit drawing-room.

"You've some theory," I accused as we shut our bedroom door against the dismal crowd downstairs. "What is it?"

"This afternoon I have been reading in the library of our late host," de Grandin answered as he lit a cigarette, "and what I read may throw some light upon these self-destructions. Mademoiselle Kirsten furnished us the clue when she told us that accursèd picture came from Constantinople. You are familiar with the culture of Byzantium?"

"Only vaguely."

"One assumed as much. Very well: The Greeks of that old city were an evil lot. For the most part they conformed to Christianity only outwardly, and conformity with them was largely but an overlaying of the ancient cults with a thin veneer of outward faith. At heart they never lost their paganism, and paganism, my friend, is far from being the sweet, pretty thing our pastoral poets would depict it.

"Diana of the Ephesians, the All Mother, sometimes known as *Magna Mater,* was no prototype of the Blessèd Virgin; quite otherwise, I do assure you. There were dark mysteries in the groves of Aricia beside the lake men called the Mirror of Diana. Dionysos, who has been so celebrated by our neopagan poets that we commonly regard him as a hearty boon companion, was far from being so. True, he was the god of women, wine and song, but his women were harlots, his wine was drunkenness, his songs the ditties of the brothel. At his midnight festivals men and women cast their garments off and ran with staring eyes and unbound hair between the swaying trees, frenzied with the worship of their god, and his worship was unbridled lust. Little children were caught up by grown men and women, oftentimes their own parents, and forcibly initiated in the rites of drunkenness and carnal love. Aphrodite's priestesses were mere strumpets, working openly in competition with the common women of the town. Adonis, that pale lovely boy so famed in poetry and picture, was worshipped with the sacrifice of boars. *Ha,* but there were places where his female votaries, anxious to assimilate their god through the intervention of his sacred animals, assumed the name and rôle of sows!

"Such were the deities of paganism. They were not gods, but devils. Yet for hundreds of years they had been worshipped with revolting ceremonies. Would people long accustomed to a religion of drunkenness and lechery willingly forgo it for the gentle, simple rites of Christianity? Not willingly, but Constantine the great gave them their choice of Cross or sword, and they chose the Cross. Yet ever the old and wicked faith persisted, always there were found some worshippers of the old ones in the secret places.

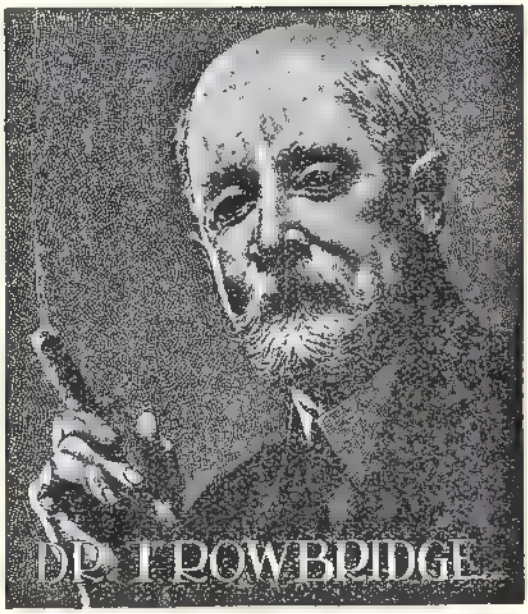
"*Bien.* It was not safe to flaunt their heathen practises. The lictors of the Emperor were ever on the watch for those who frequented suspicious gatherings; so, like the gambling-houses in your puritanical communities where gaming is prohibited, they must perforce resort to subterfuge. They had chapels to all outward seeming dedicated to the holy saints, and in those chapels they had furniture which semed devoted to the Christian worship. But as the witty Monsieur Gilbert says in his opera *Pinafore,* 'Things are seldom what they seem.' A quick change here, the drawing of a curtain or pressing of a hidden spring there, and the sacred Christian ikons become horrid instruments of evil, base scenes which pander to the passions like those which graced the obscene sanctuary of the goddess Aphrodite.

"But in some instances these Christians-who-were-no-Christians did not depend on anything so crude as mere mechanical appliances. They had skilled workmen make the holy images, sacred

pictures, sacerdotal vessels which by means of cunning spells and conjurations were endowed with power to change their aspect of their own accord when the concentrated thought of evil persons focused on them. Happily, we do not know just what these wicked old ones' magic was; we do know that it comprehended human sacrifice and defilement of the sacred things of Christianity. We know also that periodically it was necessary that a victim be immolated, else the evil power of these Jekyll-Hyde things made of gold and stone and silver would be lost.

"Now, Friend Trowbridge, thoughts are things. Who is it that is not unpleasantly impressed when standing in a dungeon of the bad old Middle Ages? Who can look upon the blade of that blood-thirsty guillotine with which so many brave and lovely necks were severed while the Terror raged in *la belle France* and forbear to shiver? Who can hold a hangman's rope within his hands and not have feelings of a vague uneasiness? No one but the veriest clod, *pardieu!* For why? Because, I tell you, thoughts are things. The evil passions, the emotions of hatred, anger or despair which flowed so freely round these solid objects soaked into them as water penetrates a porous stone. And ever and anon those very thoughts are loosed—exhaled, if you prefer the term—upon the world again.

"*Bien. Très bien. Tout va bien.* In Monsieur Classon's books I read something of the history of this so hateful picture which he showed us. The Crusaders under Baldwin stole it from a place they thought to be a Christian chapel when they sacked Constantinople. *Ha,* but the one who brought it back to Venice soon discovered his mistake! He set it up upon the altar of a church, and straightway evil things began to happen. Good women



praying at that altar turned to strumpets; mild, godly men were roused to deeds of lust and violence. At last the good priests exorcised the lovely, evil thing; then to make assurance doubly sure, got rid of it.

"But Italians were Italians then as now. Instead of throwing it away, destroying it, they sold it to a Frenchman!

"Piously, my guileless countryman took the vile thing home with him and made an offering of it to a house of Benedictines. *Nom d'un rat,* within a month all hell had broken loose in that community! The monks forgot their vows, and I regret to state the nuns did likewise. They mortified the flesh with mutton pie on Fridays, they drank sweet wines and sang some tunes which had a most unchurchly air, and other things they did which more befitted soldiers and women of the camp than sober-lifed conventuals. It was a gay and naughty time they had until the bishop heard of it.

"CAME the Revolution. Tired of being trodden underfoot the people rose, and like a rabid, sightless

beast struck right and left in frenzy, cutting down the just and unjust in their anger. The convents and religious houses were suppressed and sacred vessels melted down and turned to money to assist the Government in waging war against the foreign despots who would seat a king again upon the throne of France and place the tyrant's heel once more upon the people's neck. But not this one, *hélas!*

"An English milord bought it and took it to his *triste* and foggy little island. *Eh bien,* he was quite a fellow, that one! The things he did were shocking, even to a generation which was noted for its tolerance. If he coveted a neighbor's wife that neighbor would have been advised to say his paternosters, for our gallant lord was skilled in sword-play and could crack a wine-glass stem at twenty paces with his pistol bullet. Also it appeared that Satan was a loving guardian of his own; for when the injured gentleman sent friends to wait on the seducer of his wife or fiancée or daughter, he might have saved his heirs much trouble if he had sent messengers to interview the clerk, the parson and the sexton, for he soon had need of all their offices.

"*Tiens,* the devil is a mocker, always. After many years of startlingly successful sin our noble lord was caught red-handed as a card cheat. His fortune had been wasted by extravagance, the Jews of Lombard Street refused to lend him further money on his lands, he became a bankrupt and perished miserably in debtor's prison.

"Among the items seized by creditors was this same accursed picture. For years it gathered dust in storage, then was put on sale at auction. Monsieur Classon's uncle purchased it, but luckily for him he kept it in a safe deposit box, and not until a year ago was it brought out and placed among the treasures of the gun-room. Again his luck held good, for he was much away from home, and though there were some stories of some naughty intrigues in the servants' quarters, who knows if these were influenced by the presence of the picture in this house or simply the result of poor, weak human nature?

"At any rate *Monsieur* the Senior Classon died and his nephew took possession of this house and all things in it. When did he first perceive this picture of the saint was not as other pictures? One wonders. Surely, he must have noticed it, for it had him greatly worried. A Frenchman, an Italian, an Irishman or Highland Scot, even a Spaniard, perhaps, would at once have recognized that there was something *outré,* other-worldly, in the way that picture seemed to change its scenes and in the feeling of repulsion yet attraction it engendered in him. But certainly. These people have imagination. But Americans and Englishmen? *Non!* 'This thing is not in keeping with the general rule of things,' they would tell themselves. 'Me, I have seen things, things which most certainly are not there to be seen. Therefore it is my eyes which are at fault. I shall consult an oculist. I have felt things I never felt before; I have felt the power of utter, concentrated wickedness. I am not like that, me. No, I go to church five Sundays in the year, and pay my taxes and obey such laws as it is convenient to obey. I am a thoroughly good citizen, an Anglo-Saxon; I do not believe in fairies, Santa Claus or witchcraft, even if I do put credence in the literature that stock-promoters send me. This feeling of malaise I have whenever I am near that picture is due to indigestion. *Voilà,* I shall buy some pills next time I pass a pharmacy.' Yes, my friend, that is the way of it.

"But Monsieur Classon was not easy in his mind. He had seen things, he had

felt things that neither spectacles nor patent medicines could cure. And so instead of seeking someone competent to give advice, he tried experiments upon his friends, asked them to the gunroom, bade them look upon this old Greek ikon and tell him what it was they saw. If they saw nothing strange he took their testimony as evidence that his feelings of discomfort and his visions of unpleasant things had come from his disordered faculties, not from some outside source. *Tiens,* that way madness lay."

"But granting all you say, and it seems incredible, what induced Farraday to stab himself?" I asked.

He teased the needle-points of his mustache between a thoughtful thumb and forefinger. At length:

"Ecstasy is hard to reason with," he answered slowly. "We see it manifest itself in various phases. The nun who kneels in breathless adoration at the altar feels no discomfort though the cold stones bite her knees till the flesh is almost separated from the bone. The Indian fakir and the Moslem dervish inflict unutterable tortures on themselves, yet feel no pain. Devotees of olden gods, Aphrodite, Moloch, Dionysos, Adonis, cut and hacked and cruelly mutilated their bodies while ecstatic fervor gripped them. Monsieur Farraday was a highly nervous, highly imaginative, highly organized man. Influences which would not affect the average person took tremendous hold on him. He had lived not long, but much. It is probable there was no sensation which he had not tasted sometime. The lure to self-destruction grows more potent as we deplete the possibility of fresh experience. That the evil influence of this picture swayed him we can hardly doubt. He had hidden it, but he induced Mademoiselle Kirsten to come and see it. Why? Merely because it was an ancient thing of lovely workmanship? I cannot think so. Deliberately, having felt the lure and terror and excitement which inevitably followed a period of gazing at that evil picture, he desired to initiate her into them. It was like the drug addict who seeks to corrupt others to his evil practises. Yes, that is so."

"And Classon?"

"We cannot surely know. He has sealed his lips; but I think if he could talk he would tell a tale of slowly mounting terror, yet a fascination which would not let him leave off looking at the dreadful scenes he saw when the picture changed its aspect. Like Mademoiselle Kirsten and the book which terrified her so, he must needs go back and back to look and look again upon that which no human eye should see. It was like a siren-song luring him to sure destruction. When his friend Farraday had broken with the strain and sacrificed himself a votive offering to sin, the strain on Monsieur Classon was past bearing. Perhaps his reason snapped, perhaps he felt an impulse to emulate his friend—any police officer knows that suicidal impulses are contagious. *En tout cas,* there it is. Farraday is dead, self-murdered, Classon is dead by his own hand——"

"And Miss Kirsten?" I broke in.

"*Précisément,* Mademoiselle Kirsten. I think we shall do well to watch that lovely one, both for her sake and ours."

"Ours?"

"Perfectly. If we keep close watch on her we shall prevent her emulation of those other poor ones; also we may find that she will guide us to an explanation of this Christian-heathen ikon."

"But good heavens, man! We've been chatting here for hours; she may have gone and——"

"No fear," he interrupted with a smile. "Me, I took the care. The gun-

room door I nailed tight shut, for I was certain if she meant to harm herself it would be on the same spot where the others offered up their lives, and—*mordieu—nom de nom de nom de nom!* Why had I not thought of it before?"

"What in the world——"

"*S-s-sh,* my friend, keep still; be silent as the *chauve-souris* when she goes flitter-flitting in the twilight. Me, I have the inspiration, the idea, the—what you call him?—hunch. Yes."

He tiptoed down the corridor till he stood outside Miss Kirsten's door, then, almost in a shout, announced, "Yes, my friend, it is amazing. I cannot think how I forgot it. The gunroom door is nailed tight shut, but the windows are unfastened. I must have them nailed the first thing in the morning."

Making more noise than the occasion semed to warrant, he tramped back to our door and slammed it, shoved me unceremoniously aside and seized his woolen muffler from the dresser.

"Come," he commanded as he wound the reefer round his neck, "I do not think we shall have long to wait."

"What the dickens are you up to?" I demanded as he led me down the stairs, taking care to step on the innermost edges of the treads so that no telltale squeak should give warning of our descent.

"Cannot you see? I have given her the hint, shown her how the way is open. If she feels the mastering-urge to seek the gunroom, perhaps intent on suicide, she will surely do it now, and through the open window. We must be there first."

It was cold and quiet as a mausoleum in the empty gunroom as we clambered through the window. In accordance with custom a fire had been laid on the andirons, but no logs had burned there since the night before, and the eery chill which permeates all empty places filled the darkened chamber to its farthest corner. Stabbing through the darkness with his flashlight, de Grandin finally decided on the space behind a yellow-taffeta upholstered sofa as the spot to lay our ambush, and we sank down to begin our vigil.

I had no way of telling time, for de Grandin had insisted that we leave our watches off lest their ticking warn our quarry of our presence. My feet grew cold, then stiff, then "full of pins and needles" as I crouched behind the couch. We dared not talk, we hardly dared to change position lest the creaking of a board betray us. At last, when I was willing to affirm on oath our vigil had endured a month, I felt the pressure of de Grandin's fingers on my elbow. Slowly, soundlessly, but steadily, the window opposite to where we crouched was being raised. In the half-light shining from the snow outside we descried a figure almost shapeless in the gloom, but plainly feminine.

The rasping of a match, the little flare of orange flame against Egyptian darkness, the pale, clear glow of burning olive oil as the hanging lamps were lighted, showed us Karen Kirsten.

She had thrust her bare feet into fur-lined carriage boots, and with one hand she held her coat of priceless sable tight across her breast. Her eyes shone phosphorescent in the lamplight's glow, like the eyes of an animal. Her lips' moist crimson and the pearl-hard sheen of little teeth between them fascinated me. Unbidden came the thought of Clarimonde, of Margarita Hauffe and her victims.

She faced the ikon and we saw her bosom heave beneath its sheath of gleaming fur. Her breath came rasping, grindingly, almost like the labored breathing of a patient *in extremis* with nephritis. A little skirl of laughter stung

her scarlet mouth, not loud, but terribly intense. I thought that never had I heard a cry more blasphemous than that light cachinnation.

Her eyes were straining toward the ikon which she had thrown open so its triple picture caught the full force of the ever-shifting beams which slanted downward from the swinging lamps. They were fixed, intense, half closed, as though the violence of her gaze was too annihilating to be loosed direct; it seemed as though the very substance of her soul and body would pour out of those set, staring eyes.

"Master," came her thin-edged whisper, mordant as a storm-blast in December, "lord, possessor, ever-living conqueror of flesh and soul and spirit—I am here!"

She kicked the fur-topped boots from off her feet and put her hands up to the collar of her coat, throwing back the garment and permitting it to fall in coruscating brown-black coils upon the floor behind her. Then with a wrench she tore her marigold-hued negligée from throat to hem.

Whiter than a figure carved from Parian marble, whiter than an image fresh-cut from new ivory she stood before the altar-table with its golden-gleaming ikon in her pallid slenderness.

It was no wonder that two hundred million movie-fans were mad about her, for she was beautiful almost past describing. Her graciously turned arms, her slender, gently swelling hips, her tapering legs, her full, high, pointed breasts were utterly breath-taking in their loveliness. The Greeks had a word for her, *chryselephantinos*—formed of gold and ivory!

Strangely mystic she stood there; more mysterious, the odd thought came to me, in the starkness of her nudity than when hidden in the swathe of clinging garments.

Statue-still she stood, only her left hand moving a little as it fluttered upward toward her breast, then forward, like a tower toppling when its cornerstone is wrenched away, like a silver-birch tree crashing when the axman's final stroke cuts through its roots, she fell face-downward on the floor and lay there motionless.

The lamplight glimmered on the whiteness of her body and the bright gold of her hair, flecking, flowing shadows interchanging quickly with bright spots of light as she clasped her hands behind her neck and beat her forehead softly on the floor before the ikon.

"The pictures—*mort d'un rat!*—see the pictures, good Friend Trowbridge; do you see them now?" de Grandin whispered in my ear.

I saw, and a wave of retching nausea swept across me as I looked.

How it happened I know not, but the little bits of colored stone which formed the pictures in the ikon had rearranged themselves, leaving the compositions of the scenes unchanged, but the subject-matter utterly transformed. Where the group of laughing youths and maidens had been dancing there was now a ring of naked, scrawny parodies of men and women holding hands and dancing back to back in the dreadful rigadoon which marked the witches' sabbat. Where the pretty babes had crept in infantile delight was now a crowd of edematous, hideously bloated monsters, obscenely tumefied, their faces formless as the features of a creature molded out of dough, yet with enough resemblance to the human countenance to show the nightmare grins which stretched their livid mouths and creased their puffy cheeks. They crept and crawled and sprawled upon each other like sightless slugs which

come to light when rotting logs are lifted, nor could I say if they were filled with loathing or obscene affection for each other as they intermingled all but formless bodies in a sort of fictive struggle.

But the center panel showed the greatest metamorphosis of all. The saint had shed his penitential garment of rough camel's hair and in its place his loins were girded with a leopardskin. The cross-topped staff was now a spear with gleaming lance-head; rawhide clogs had turned to golden buskins laced up the leg with straps of scarlet leather; a wreath of wild wood-roses bound his hair. It was a figure of sheer beauty, slender, straight, white-limbed and white-bodied as a girl, with a face too delicate to be a man's, not soft enough to be a woman's. The stern, forbidding glance had vanished, yet the eyes had lost no whit of their compulsion. They seemed to catch and hold all other eyes, they burned and smoldered with an intolerable sadness, yet their brightness was so great that it was fairly dazzling.

"Mon Dieu, it is the Lord of Evil!" Jules de Grandin whispered. "Satanas, Lucifer, Adonis!"

A CHILL we had not felt before came through the room. It was not the hard bitterness of the storm wind thrusting through the partly opened window, nor the close, still cold of a place long empty and unheated; there was an otherworldliness to it, the utter gelidness of the freezing eternities of interstellar space, a cold which seemed to paralyze the soul and spirit even as it numbed the body. Perhaps it was a trick of shifting lights caused by the swaying of the swinging lamps, but I could swear that on the wall behind the altar where the ikon stood there formed a patch of gloom, a shadow-shape which etched a figure in dull silhouette. And it was a figure of fear. Bat-winged it was, and horribly malformed, with slanting brow, protruding chin and great tusks jutting upward toward a nose which had the outline of a predatory vulture-beak. Great claw-armed hands attached to scaly arms seemed reaching outward through the semi-dark to fasten on the woman prostrate on the floor.

"Attendez-moi, my friend," de Grandin whispered; "do exactly as I say, or we shall lose our lives, perhaps our souls as well. When I step forward, do you take up anything that comes to hand and with it strike that cursèd ikon from its place. When you have struck, strike on, and keep on striking till you have demolished it completely. Oh, do not stop to bandy silly questions, friend; three lives depend upon your doing as I say, believe it!"

Mystified, but willing to obey his orders, I nodded mute assent, and reached up for a double-bladed Tartar ax which hung clamped to the wall above us.

"Monsieur"—de Grandin stepped from his concealment and bent his body stiffly from the hips as though addressing someone formally—*"Monsieur le Démon,* we will fight you for her. We are but mortal men, but by the faith we hold and by the strength that faith imparts, we fling our gage into your face, and offer you wager of battle for this woman's soul and body. More, if that is not enough, we will pledge our own, as well!"

It was not quite a laugh that answered him, indeed, it was not any sound which human ears can record; rather, it was as if a feeling, a subjective impression, of boundless and colossal scorn swept through the room, and like a dried leaf borne before the wind the little Frenchman was hurled back against the wall

with an impact so terrific that I heard his bones crack as he struck the plaster-covered brick.

"Remember my instructions, good Friend Trowbridge—*strike!*" he gasped while he strove to wrench himself from the position into which he had been forcd by that unseen malevolence.

He was suffering, I could see.. The force with which he struck the wall had knocked the breath out of him, and something which I could not see was pressing on his throat, his diaphragm, his limbs, and held him with his arms outstretched and head thrown back as though he had been crucified. He gasped and fought for breath, but the struggle was uneven. In a moment he would fall unconscious from asphyxia, for no air could reach his lungs, and his lips were even then beginning to show blue while his eyeballs started from their sockets.

Across the room I leapt, swinging my double-bladed ax about my head and bringing it down with all my might upon the golden ikon on the altar.

It seemed for an instant that I had cut into an electric cable, for a shock of numbing pain ran up my forearms, and I all but dropped my weapon as I staggered back.

"*Bravo, bravissimo,* my friend; that was nobly done!" De Grandin's voice was stronger, now; he had managed to inhale a breath of air, but even as he cheered me came a rattling in his throat. He was being throttled by his unseen adversary

I struck again, and this time swept the ikon to the floor. It fell face-downward, its pictures hidden from my sight.

A surge of sudden wild, insensate anger swept through me. How or why I did not know, but this picture somehow was responsible for Jules de Grandin's plight. When I assaulted it he gained a temporary respite, in the momentary pause between my blows he suffered strangulation. I went stark, raving mad. For a wild, exhilarated moment I knew the fury and the joy our Saxon forebears felt when they went berserker and, armor cast aside, leapt bare-breasted into battle.

I felt my ax-blade cleave the ikon's golden plates, wrenched it free and struck again; chopping, hewing, battering. The heavy golden plates were bent and broken, now, and little bits of colored stone were strewn about the floor where my furious assault had smashed the priceless mosaics. I drove my ax-head through the center panel, cleft the figure of the beautiful young man in twain, cut the dancing horrors into bits, smashed the crawling infantile monstrosities to utter formlessness; finally, insane with murderous rage, drove the battered golden casque into the fireplace as a hockey-player might shoot the puck into the goal-net, then reached up frenziedly, dragged down a hanging lamp and dashed it on the logs which lay in order ready for the match.

The dry wood kindled like a torch, and as the leaping ocherous flame licked hungrily at the shapeless mass which had a moment earlier been a priceless relic of the tessellater's art, de Grandin staggered forward, gasping thirstily for air like a diver coming to the surface after long immersion.

"Oh, excellent Friend Trowbridge, *brave camarade: camarade brave comme l'epée qu'il porte, parbleu,* but I do love you!" he exclaimed, and before I could defend myself had flung his arms around me, drawn me to him and planted a resounding kiss upon each cheek.

"I'm sorry that I lost my head and wrecked that lovely thing," I muttered, gazing ruefullly at the melting gold and flame-discolored fragments of bright marble in the fireplace.

"Sorry? *Mort de ma vie,* it is your sober reason that speaks now—and when has truth been found in staid sobriety? Your instinct was truer when it urged that you consign this loathsome thing to cleansing fire. *Tiens,* had someone had the wit to do it seven hundred years ago, how much misery would have been averted! *Pah!*" —he seized the poker and probed viciously at the remnants of the reliquary — "burn, curse you! Your makers and your votaries have stewed and fried in hell for centuries; go thou to join them, naughty thing!" Abruptly:

"Come, we have work to do, Friend Trowbridge; let us be about it."

We draped the sable coat round Karen Kirsten, drew the fur-trimmed boots upon her feet, bundled up her tattered negligée, then, quietly as a pair of burglars, took her through the window, through the service-pantry door, and upstairs to her bedroom.

"It is well *Monsieur le Capitaine* had but two men set to watch the house," de Grandin chuckled as we got the girl's pajamas on and drew the bedclothes over her. "The young man who snores so watchfully before the kitchen door would be surprized if he could know with what impunity his charges come and go at will, I think."

"I SUPPOSE you're going to tell me thoughts are things, and that explains the goings-on we've witnessed?" I accused as we got into bed.

"By damn, I am," he answered with a sleepy laugh. "If it were not so I should have had a merry chase to find a reason for these evil doings. Attend me, if you please: That ikon might be called a devil's palimpsest. First the olden, wicked tessellaters contrived the scenes we saw tonight, the wicked worshippers of evil gods who danced together back to back, as in the days when dancing widdershins paid honor to the pig-faced Moloch, the terrible, amorphous things which typified primeval wickedness, finally the Lord Adonis. Then by a trick of cunning workmanship they overlaid their true design with those sweet, innocuous scenes of innocence, and in the center set the picture of a saint. 'Beauty is in the beholder's eye,' the ancient proverb says. It might have added that wickedness and goodness are to a great extent the same. Only when summoned by deliberate thought of evil did the underlying pictures dedicated to the unclean worship of the evil old ones come to light; at other times the ikon showed an air of innocence. *Ha,* but that was in the very long ago, my friend. Like a jar of porous earthenware filled constantly with aromatic liquids, this ikon was the center of a very evil worship, the receptacle of concentrated thoughts of wickedness and hate. Thoughts are things; they filled the very substance of the ikon as the aromatic liquors will in time so permeate the fiber of the earthen jug that it will always afterward give off their scent. Yes, certainly.

"In time the evil principle became so strongly concentrated in this ikon that it changed unbidden from its good to wicked aspect, and this was so especially when the person who beheld it harbored secret thoughts of sin. More, it added to, it strengthened these desires for evil. Did the person in its presence have suppressed longings to forsake the ways of soberness and take to drink? His resolution to remain a sober citizen was straightway weakened to the breaking-point, his thirst for drink increased tenfold. And so right through the Decalogue. Whatever secret evil one had struggled with and conquered became so magnified when he came in this ikon's presence that he was unable to resist the sinful urge. He was vanquished, beaten, routed, lost in sin.

"And as person after person yielded to its wicked influence this devil's tool waxed ever greater in its strength. Eventually it was not necessary for the one corrupted to have harbored evil thought; he need only be impressionable, psychic, to behold the changing of the pictures and, unless he had unusual strength of character, to succumb to their foul lure. Karen Kirsten realized this when first she stepped into the gunroom; Wyndham Farraday had suffered from the same experience; often Philippe Classon must have seen those pictures change; it was that which preyed upon his mind and made him seek to lull his fears by having others look at them and hear the testimony which they gave. You see? It is quite simple. Yes. Thoughts most assuredly are things."

"But why should they select Adonis as typifying Evil?" I demanded. "As I recall it, he was a shy young man whom Venus wooed——"

"In Monsieur Shakespeare's poems, yes," he interrupted, "but not in the belief of those who worshipped Evil for its evil self. No, not at all; by no means.

"When those wicked ones were gathered to make mock of holy things and bend the knee to sinfulness, they invoked some god or goddess of the ancient days, or, in later times, the devil. At gatherings of devil-worshippers it was not always as a hairy man or goat that the devil was adored. He had other aspects, too. Sometimes he came as a most beautiful young man, Lucifer the Lightbearer; as Baron Satanas, cold, haughty, proud, but most distinguished in appearance; sometimes as Adonis, the young man beautiful and cold as ice, impervious alike to little children's lisping pleas or woman's charming beauty—it was not bashfulness, but utter, cold indifference that made Adonis proof against the blandishments of the Queen of Love and Beauty. He it was—still is, *parbleu!*—who gave nothing in return for worship but lies and bitter disappointments.

"Besides, the men who made those pictures and the worshippers who bent the knee before it were Greeks; degenerate Greeks, of course, but still inheritors of the culture that was Athens. A Greek could not do homage to a god, even to a god of evil, who was anything but beautiful."

"That dreadful shadow that we saw, the shadow that seemed to detach itself from the wall and reach toward Karen Kirsten just before you challenged it?" I asked. "That was——"

"Thought made manifest, my friend. The evil thought which for generation upon generation had been poured upon that cursèd ikon, that devil's palimpsest. It was the same thought that induced rebellion in the heavens against the power of good, the thought which prompted Cain to slay his brother, which brought the sacrificial babes to Moloch; *parbleu,* it was everything that is detestable and vile concresced into that little reservoir which was that never-to-be-sufficiently-anathematized palimpsest of Satan!"

"It's positively the damndest thing I ever saw," swore Captain Chenevert next day. "Two killings in that room with no more clues to 'em than if they'd been in China. Then someone sneaks in there last night and smashes up a piece of bric-à-brac so valuable that no one can appraise it. Hanged if it doesn't almost seem as if the place were haunted!"

"I damn think you have right, *Monsieur le Capitaine,*" de Grandin answered, his face expressionless as a death mask.

He reached out for the bell-pull: "Will you have Scots or Irish with your soda water, gentlemen?"

The Ho-Ho Kam Horror

By BRUCE BRYAN

It was a very real and tangible horror that closed in on the archeologist on Superstition Mountain, as told in the fascinating pages of this thrilling goose-flesh story

THE first intimation I had that anything might be wrong with my friend Fulton Shirley was when I saw Jim Red-Cloud riding his pinto down the dusty main street of Picacho.

It immediately struck me as peculiar, because as foreman of the archeologist's native laborers Jim Red-Cloud was supposed to be up there on Superstition Mountain with the expedition. In his letter to me several weeks before, Shirley stated that he was fully equipped to spend three months, if necessary, in those inaccessible mountain fastnesses. So it was hardly likely the Indian was in town to purchase supplies.

Some faint premonition aroused in me a sudden lively interest. I ran after the Pima and caught at his bridle reins.

"Jim Red-Cloud!" I exclaimed. "What are you doing here in town? I thought you were with Mr. Shirley. Is anything wrong?"

The Indian paused unwillingly, his beady eyes smoldering with unfathomed fires.

"I no longer work for Mr. Shirley, Mr. Forsythe," he haid hesitantly. "I—I left him several days ago."

"But why?" My demand was emphasized by an involuntary jerk at his horse's twitching mouth. Jim Red-Cloud had accompanied Shirley on all of his numerous explorations in the Southwest.

For a moment a gleam seemed to flare up in the man's black eyes. He muttered something under his breath, and I thought I caught the words "bad medicine." Impatiently, he tried to pull away. But I hung on to the bridle, a growing sense of apprehension coming over me. Something in the Pima's expression filled me with an indefinable dread.

"Look here, Jim," I insisted. "I happen to know that Mr. Shirley intended to remain on the mountain for two or three months. And I know that you were hired to go with him. What's happened?"

The Indian drew himself up angrily. In his regard just then was some of that scorn the red man has always shown for the usurping white.

"On the Mountain-That-Is-Heaven," he hissed fiercely, "the white man is a trespasser. Yig-Satuti does not welcome visitors who come to dig up his secrets. It is bad medicine for those who seek to disturb the ancient dwelling-place of the god."

With this cryptic utterance he jerked his reins loose from my grip and galloped down the street. In a few minutes I saw him ride out of town, headed apparently for the Pima reservation. And for the space of half a hundred heartbeats I stood rooted to the spot, overcome by the Indian's attitude, my mind struggling with an insidious sensation of menace. *Something*, I was convinced, threatened Fulton Shirley.

There was only one thing to do. I turned my steps toward Sheriff Dawson's office. Fortunately, I found him in, riffling through a stack of "Wanted" notices and swatting irritably at an unusually agile bottle-fly. He glanced up at me rather peevishly, then grinned reluctantly as recognition lit his stern features.

"Damn me if it ain't the grave-robber's pal!" he greeted, thrusting out a huge paw. "What choice bit of ghoul's work are you up to now, son?"

The words made me wince. But I took the proffered hand eagerly and poured my misgivings like a spring freshet into his ear. The grizzled law officer, wise in his experience with Indians since the days when Arizona was one of the Nations, listened stolidly. No expression crossed his rugged features, and he didn't interrupt me once. But when I finished what I had to say he ground his cigar out on a scarred boot heel, jammed a big Stetson on his white head, and rose ponderously to his feet.

"We'll be riding out to the mountain," he sighed. "I've seen some of Shirley's redskins in town the past day or two and

"It was a serpent, and a colossal one."

it's had me wondering. Can you start the first thing in the morning?"

EARLY the following day the sheriff and I, together with a couple of his deputies, loaded a pack-horse and headed north across the glaring desert toward the grim mass of Superstition Mountain. The day threatened to be hot, but the early morning air was heady with the tang of mesquite and chaparral. As I tried to accustom myself to the jolting pace of the raw mustang that had been loaned to me, I found my mind running back over the incidents leading up to Shirley's trip into that weirdly beautiful natural fortress whose crags and buttresses loomed in a purple haze some fifty miles distant.

Fulton Shirley was one of the foremost Southwestern archeologists. Lately he had become intrigued in attempting to run to earth the origins of a very ancient and mysterious race. The Ho-ho-kam, so-called from the modern Pima term meaning "Vanished People," invaded the Lower Gila valley somewhere around two thousand years ago. Their great walled communal villages were scattered all over the southern half of what is now the state of Arizona, but when Coronado drove his steel-clad wedge through the Southwest in the Sixteenth Century the towns were in ruins and the inhabitants utterly vanished.

Such a racial enigma provided a direct challenge to a man of Shirley's temperament, and he had spent several years in excavating the lesser ruins that dot the Gila basin's wastelands. And then one evening an itinerant prospector wandered into his camp in the Dragoons, picked up one of the many pieces of red-on-buff pottery lying about, and remarked that he had seen a place littered with the stuff up in the hidden summits of Superstition Mountain. It was, he expanded, a massive village of crumbling walls and towers. My friend's eyes glowed. He had heard rumors of such a lost city and long had entertained a hope of discovering the capital of this prehistoric civilization.

After this, nothing could shake his determination to explore the legended pinnacles. Most of a year rolled by, however, before he had completed his investigations in the Dragoons and was able to undertake a new expedition. Meanwhile, I had been summoned East for an indefinite period.

In New York I received my last letter from the archeologist before he left Picacho. In it, as I have remarked, he mentioned that he was prepared for a three months' stay. There was also an account of his conversation with Many Winds, the withered and senile Pima medicine man, whom he had interviewed in his brush wickiup on the reservation.

"I wanted half a dozen men for diggers," wrote Shirley. "Jim Red-Cloud selected them, and as a matter of form it was necessary to ask the witch-doctor's permission. But when he learned where I was headed for, the old Indian nearly blew up. 'Bad medicine!' he said—a favorite expression when these redskins are in the grip of one of their pet superstitions.

"Briefly, it seems that Superstition Mountain, the Indian heaven and breeding-place of rattlesnakes for the sacred dances, is a shrine of some sort. Many Winds admitted knowledge of the Ho-ho-kam ruin, but he spoke of it as a place taboo and referred to its lost inhabitants in a mysterious way as the 'people of the Serpent.' I gather that the mountain is the seat of some secret cult happily hidden from the sacrilegious white man. Good Lord, Forsythe! Perhaps I'm on the scent of something important here!"

I CAME back to myself abruptly as our small cavalcade dipped into the somewhat declivitous descent of an arroyo. There was little conversation, for the sheriff and his deputies were taciturn men. We kept steadily on, and camped late the second night at the southern foot of Superstition Mountain's gaunt, precipitous slopes. And as I ate my supper, crouched there by our small fire, my eyes were drawn irresistibly upward to probe with fearful speculation the shadowy heights towering above.

At dawn we hobbled our mounts and began on foot the tedious climb. For the first few hundred yards we managed easily enough, winding back and forth up the gradual ascent of long canyons. Then the way became more vertical, and we had to feel out for uncertain hand- and foot-holds, often to have the rough shale crumble sickeningly under our weight. Meanwhile, we kept a wary eye out for the deadly rattlesnakes with which the entire mountain is said to be infested.

Unavoidably we brushed up against tall organ-like sajuara, or put incautious hands down in clumps of poisonous cholla, necessitating a stop now and then while the painful needles were extracted one by one. Long-eared jackrabbits scurried from our path; horned toads and scorpions and a hundred varieties of lizard scuttled swiftly from rock to rock, or eyed us unwinkingly from growths of mesquite and chaparral.

And then it came—the vibrant, pulse-freezing whirr of the diamond-back rattler. One of the deputies jumped like a startled deer, cursing luridly. Sheriff Dawson's six-gun leapt into his hand like a thing alive, its muzzle spouted flame, and a knee-high bush of sage into which his man had been about to step shook violently. A vicious flat head, torn half off the body, slid into view, followed by five feet of thrashing, mottled coils.

"Close!" grunted the sheriff unemotionally, sheathing his gun in the open holster at his side.

We went on, single file. High in the cloudless sky wheeled a vulture, drawn from its unknown eyrie by the death on our trail. I felt a sudden nameless exaltation as I looked about me at the weird beauty that clothed the breath-taking slopes. Here beauty and death were akin, and at that moment I was part of both. Everywhere we gazed were teeming evidences of wild life; and everywhere death. In a rocky draw that yawned at our left a surprized coyote loped swiftly away from a half-eaten armadillo whose prehistoric heritage of scale armor had availed it nothing against the scavenger. Chaparral birds flitted from stone to bush, twittering excitedly at our steady approach.

Perhaps there was an easier ascent than the one we took, but after another hour of arduous climbing we hauled ourselves to the brink of the last summit of the age-old mountain. We stared out on a level plateau, bordered on every hand by crenellated scarps. Invisible from the desert below, there sprawled before our eyes the crumbling walls of an ancient stone-and-adobe citadel. I could not repress an exclamation of triumph.

"The lost village of the Ho-ho-kam!"

But the sheriff, after one keen, almost uninterested glance at the hollow shell of a once thriving community, had stopped in his tracks on the edge of the tableland. Something in his manner, as he stared alertly about him, attracted our undivided attention. We hesitated, too, impressed by his behavior.

Then suddenly I understood. It was warm on that mountain top under a brazen desert sun, despite its being October. But a chill descended on me. There was something terrible here, something

threatening, something very evil. Yet not a living thing did we see as we hesitated there in the glaring light of a cloudless midday. Not a living thing—that was just it!

From the moment we climbed over the edge of that last elevation and stepped out on this hidden plateau there was an abrupt cessation of all sentient life. Nothing stirred. Even the atmosphere was still, and we heard nothing but our own labored breathing. The outer wall of the ruin was about fifty yards away, and the intervening space was covered with typical desert flora. But the fauna simply wasn't there. No small rodents scampered away from our feet, not a lizard was to be seen basking in the sun, the birds had ceased to flit about our heads, and even in the endless blue of the sky there was no sign of circling buzzard or hovering vulture.

We seemed to have crossed over some intangible border to find ourselves in a No Man's land, an oasis of oblivion surrounded on all sides by the welter of quick creatures who make their home in the arid wastelands of the Southwest. It was as if we stood in a place of death, due solely to a lack of all life.

SHERIFF DAWSON was the first to break the unnatural spell. With a characteristic grunt he trudged ahead. And as we neared the great ruin, treading on thousands of potsherds—the fragments of centuries of castaway pottery—we glimpsed what we had come for. Close to the southern retaining wall of the shattered compound was a row of tents, their canvas unrippling and motionless in the utter stillness. There were half a dozen of them, gaping emptily toward a large stone fireplace on which they centered. Under a portable cook-stove lay the blackened, smokeless embers of a fire that had been dead for days.

Back of this hearth was a shapeless crumple of torn fabric, and we knew that this had been Fulton Shirley's own tent. We ran toward it, dreading what we would find in its enshrouding folds. Never have I seen stout canvas so snarled and shredded. Had some mighty tornado hurled it down, ripped it to ribbons and wrapped it about its broken poles? This could hardly be the answer, for the tents that housed the scientist's Indian laborers were still standing, untouched.

Muttering under his breath, the sheriff pointed to several humps under the fallen shrouds. A feeling of nausea assailed me. I was afraid, terribly afaid of what we might find under the wreckage. We all bent to the task, however, with grim determination. Each grasping an edge of the canvas, we slowly peeled it back from the ground. The chaos we laid bare was almost unbelievable. The interior furnishings of Shirley's tent were demolished as if by some malicious giant's hand. Camp chairs and a folding table were smashed to kindling; a portable typewriter looked as if a great rock had been dropped on it; the camp cot was almost unrecognizable as such, except for the bedding that trailed from it in a limp, tattered heap. Clothes, papers, medical supplies, a camera—everything a man carries on a trip away from civilization was tossed about in haphazard confusion.

But of Shirley, or his body, there was no trace!

We stood looking at one another helplessly. Finally, one of the deputies started to scout around outside. The rest of us began to poke half-heartedly into the mess we had uncovered. Once I straightened up and stared toward the ruin. Its empty rooms and breached walls seemed to return my gaze like hollow, mocking eyes.

The sheriff, who had been probing

into the tangled bedding, grunted and held something up. It was a piece of ancient pottery, a large red-on-buff bowl evidently unearthed from the deserted village. But I didn't pay much attention to it at the moment, because under the wreckage of the camp table my fingers had closed on a notebook. Across the cover was stamped the single word: Diary. About to open it, I was distracted by the return of the other deputy.

"There's something funny here," he announced in a queer voice. "I find tracks where the Pimas left camp, and I can see Shirley's tracks coming toward this tent. The Indians wore moccasins or hobnailed shoes, but Shirley had riding-boots. I don't see a thing to show where or how he left. And there's something else that's got me stumped." The man pushed his sombrero back on his head and pointed in a perplexed fashion to the ground near the fallen tent.

"See those smooth whip-like places? And see where they sometimes wipe right across Shirley's tracks? Well, if they were about a tenth of the size, or less, I'd swear they were made by a snake. But——"

With a tight feling of apprehension, more gnawingly acute than a definite fear, I strolled away from the others and opened Shirley's notebook. Several post-card-size photographs were tucked into it, but beyond noticing that they appeared to be pictures of pottery, I passed them by for the time being. The first date in the diary revealed that my friend had made his camp here on the seventh of October, three days after leaving Picacho. Hurriedly, I leafed through several pages of the weirdest record that has ever dripped from a mortal man's pen, and as the true import of its slowly accumulating horror impressed itself on me I turned my back so that the others could not see my expression.

Almost speechless with consternation at what I read, I flipped over to the final entry, dated October 14. God! And this was only the eighteenth! My heart felt as if it were packed in ice as I ran my eye down those shaky lines to where the last frantic sentence struggled out in a blur of splotched ink. I shuddered. It was too wildly impossible, like the ravings of a madman. Had Shirley suffered some accident that had affected his brain?

Slowly, I examined each of the photographs in turn. Then I wondered if it were not I that was insane. At last I knew what had happened to my friend Fulton Shirley.

For what seemed an interminable space, I stood there too stunned to move. My gaze was riveted on the ruins of the ancient Ho-ho-kam stronghold with morbid fascination. What fearful secret lay hidden in those silent walls and under those mute adobe floors?—floors untrod by *human* footsteps for perhaps a thousand years.

I shook myself together and returned to my companions, to find Sheriff Dawson regarding the red-on-buff pottery bowl with a detached sort of curiosity.

"Queerest decoration I ever saw on a heathen pot," he observed, holding it out to me. "What do you make of it?"

I took it. I stared at the picture painted in rusty red ocher on the unslipped buff background, like a splash of dried blood on a mummy's leathery flesh. My mind reeled, staggered by this incontestable evidence that only clinched what I already knew. I felt sick—awfully sick. But I offered no explanation to the unspoken question in the sheriff's eyes.

It was with overwhelming relief that I heard him sigh and remark he guessed we'd better be getting back before nightfall. Darkness was closing in like a

flanking enemy as we reached our camp at the base of those spectral slopes. We turned in right after supper. Next morning we headed back for Picacho, the sheriff grumbling over his failure to find a single clue to the fate of Fulton Shirley.

I often wish that I, too, could truthfully say I have no idea of what became of my friend. But that red-on-buff bowl found in his ravaged tent, the evidence of the photographs, and the dark hints of his own diary form an unbreakable chain that can point to only one conclusion.

Herewith I append Fulton Shirley's remarkable diary, and the reader can draw his own inferences:

Journal of Fulton Shirley

OCTOBER 7. At last I have seen it with my own eyes!

We have just set up camp here on the top of Superstition Mountain, and as I stand in the entrance of my tent I can look out over the moon-silvered ruins of the once mighty fortress of the Ho-ho-kam.

Tomorrow I begin my excavations by trenching the great rubbish mounds for a cross-section of their shard content. Will I find, under those silent stones, the answer to a question that long has fascinated me? Who and what were the Ho-ho-kam, and what became of them in the end?

As for this great abandoned village—what happened to its inhabitants? Were they driven out by enemies, or did some terrible pestilence similar to the Black Death in medieval Europe wipe out the population? Or, as has occurred over and again in the arid Southwest, did their water supply fail, driving them forth to seek a new home? Another dark thought arises in me—for surely this place seems to exude an aura of lurking evil. Did some fearful, unnamable horror settle over the village and——

There *is* something queer about this place. I was warned against coming here Of course, I paid no heed to the superstitious twaddle of the Indians, but I did take precautions against the rattlesnakes that are said to overrun the mountain. All the way up I had two men, carrying light loads, precede us by several yards. They carried long sticks to beat the brush on all sides as we advanced.

They did their job faithfully. But the moment we came over the brow of the last cliff and emerged on the edge of this plateau they stopped simultaneously. As I lifted my eyebrows questioningly, Jim Red-Cloud shook his head sullenly.

"Nothing lives around the ancient village," he said. "There is no need to beat the brush here."

Odd! We were all out of breath, but even so I could not fail to remark the curiously lifeless aspect of the plain. On the way up we had flushed a bewildering variety of wild life, including a few sluggishly moving rattlers. Here there was nothing. It seems sinisterly suggestive.

Well, just now I'm completely worn out from the task of getting our equipment up those toilsome slopes. A tired body means a tired brain, full of all sorts of crazy conjectures. I'm turning in.

OCTOBER 8. Right after breakfast we started trenching the kitchen middens, or refuse mounds, lying outside the compound wall. Jim Red-Cloud is familiar with this type of work, so I left him in charge while I made a reconnaissance of the entire ruin. I estimate there are about one hundred fifty rooms, including a few towers that even in their present disintegrated condition stand four or five stories high. What a natural cita-

del this village is! The compound defense wall was originally about ten feet high, and from the elevated watchtowers the old Indian sentinels could sweep the desert below for miles in every direction.

Just inside the outer wall, a stone's throw from camp, there is a wide open space with a peculiar bowl-like depression in its center. The immediate houses face on it as if it were some sort of public plaza. From the surface it is strongly reminiscent of a Pueblan kiva, and when the men have finished cutting through the middens I believe I'll have them trench this sink.

OCTOBER 9. As I started the men trenching the sunken depression of the plaza this morning I sensed an undercurrent of—shall I say nervousness? They did not openly question my order, but their attitude was sulky. I left them to the work and went back to my tent to study the shards collected in yesterday's operations. A preponderance of red-on-buff ware indicates that this village flourished during the late colonial period of Ho-ho-kam culture, the era of greatest development. So its history goes back well over a thousand years.

After lunch Jim Red-Cloud summoned me to the scene of excavation. The laborers were gathered in a little group as I came up, talking excitedly. Superstitious fear was unmistakable on their swarthy faces.

"Kiva," said Jim Red-Cloud laconically, pointing to the end of the trench.

He was right. By some fortuitous accident the men's shovels had run right into the tunneled mouth of the ancient ceremonial chamber. I could see the circular wall curving away on each side. Mentally, I congratulated myself on the stroke of luck that had brought me right to the heart of the religious sanctuary, the very keystone of esthetic culture in any primitive habitation. Kivas are the subterranean sanctums of the tribal witch-doctors and are taboo to the laymen. Here the medicine men perform their weird rituals, and here are usually kept the hideous idols or fetishes they profess to serve.

Impatient to see what lay within, I ordered the men to clear the tons of fallen earth from the entrance shaft.

Later (about 10 o'clock). I was just finishing my notes on the day's work when Jim Red-Cloud came in with a piece of pottery under his arm. Without a word, he placed it on my camp table. It is a red-on-buff bowl, approximately eight inches in diameter, and typical of the early sedentary phase of Ho-ho-kam ceramics. Naturally, I was much elated at this evidence of the artistic ability of the primitive people who formerly lived here.

But something in my foreman's attitude arrested me. The Pima stood with folded arms, watching me with onyx-like eyes whose very lack of expression imparted a sense of uneasiness. He uttered not a word, and after an awkward moment of hesitation I examined the bowl more closely.

In my profession one is schooled in entertaining a practical outlook on whatever may turn up in the course of a scientific investigation. Nevertheless, a thrill shot through me as I stared at the two decorations painted on the surface of this age-old piece of molded clay.

On one side is pictured the most hideous representation of a rattlesnake a human being could conceive. The serpent is bad enough in itself. But what adds a distinctly unpleasant impression is the pair of membranous wings sprouting out of the scaly back some distance

below the vicious head. These hideous skeletal appendages are upraised, pterodactyl-like, as if the reptile is about to take to the air in deadly pursuit.

Pursuit of what, I wondered, idly turning the pot around. And then I saw. On the other side, directly opposite the winged snake, is the likeness of a fleeing man. Mere words cannot adequately portray the latent horror of these macabre pictures, done in blood-rusty hue on baked earthenware. All I can say is that my mouth went suddenly dry as I took in the obvious inference: the ravening serpent is chasing the panic-stricken human figure!

"Good heaven, Jim!" I gasped. "Where on earth did you get it?"

The Indian studied me for a moment with unfathomable eyes.

"It was buried in the mouth of the kiva. You ordered us to clear the fill. The men do not like it. They say——"

I stared at him almost apprehensively. "Yes," I prompted. "What do they say?"

"They say it is bad medicine, Mr. Shirley. This mountain is Yig-Satuti's, and only the purified Zuni and Hopi rain priests are permitted to come here. They borrow the sacred snakes for their dances, and when the rites are over, the serpents are released to find their way back. But even they do not crawl as high as this plateau."

"And what do you suggest, Jim?"

"The men want to rebury the ancient bowl. It is a sacred thing. And they think we should leave this place."

"Don't be ridiculous, Jim!" I snapped angrily. "You're not a superstitious child. You went to the white man's schools. And you've been with me a long time. Tell me, just what or who is this Yig-Satuti?"

The Pima winced at my words, as if they expressed some damnable blasphemy. In the smoldering depths of his eyes modern teachings seemed to struggle with the antique lore of his savage forefathers.

"Some things the white man's schools do not teach," he whispered almost fearfully. "Some things they do not know. Yig-Satuti is the Indian's god beyond all other gods. It is not well to speak his name, for he is jealous of his secrecy. Those who know, worship him in hidden places that the white man does not suspect. It is better so. Yig-Satuti is older than the earth itself, and all wisdom is his heritage. Here on his mountain we are trespassers. Much evil will come if we do not go."

Then, without heeding my demands for more information, Jim Red-Cloud turned on his heel and left me staring at that strange ancient pottery in an uncertain frame of mind. His thinly veiled allusions to a great Snake God, the oldest and most horrible of all mankind's mystic cults, have stimulated fearsome ideas in my head.

I'm feeling a little faint. The cold seems to be seeping into my tent. Those blankets on my bed are too tempting to resist.

OCTOBER 10. It was cold when I woke up this morning. I'd have lingered in bed awhile, but the first thing my eyes fell on was that red-on-buff bowl sitting on my camp table. It reminded me of the kiva and the work outlined for the day. But there was something else. I felt a rippling of the nerves at the back of my neck. Something about that old pot struck me as queer—its appearance was different in some way from last night.

I couldn't figure out what it was, and

I soon found that I couldn't lie there looking at it. I hurried on with my clothes and went outside to breakfast. As Jim Red-Cloud served me, I saw the men standing a few paces away in an uneasy group. They looked sullen, tense; so I bolted my meal without delay.

"Look here, you fellows," I began abruptly, striding over to them. "I don't know what you're afraid of. But we're going to stay here. I want the entrance to that kiva cleared today, and I'm doubling your wages to have it done quickly. Now get to work!"

Muttering somewhat sheepishly, they picked up their tools and shuffled off. I went back to my tent to complete my classification of the shards. There were a few identifications of intrusive ware that kept me busy all day.

After supper Jim Red-Cloud stopped in to report the progress of the "dig." His eyes fell on the ancient bowl on my table, and I could plainly see his jaw drop. A curious fit of agitation came over him; then suddenly he turned and almost ran from my presence. Astonished at his behavior, my own gaze dwelt on the thing.

There is certainly something wrong—something definitely different about it. But for the life of me I don't know what. Besides, I have discovered that looking at the pot for more than a few minutes at a time has a remarkable effect on me. It is hard to explain. Doubtless you know that when you stare steadily at an object in shadow, sooner or later it seems to move. Staring at the bowl produces somewhat the same illusion, but the sensation I receive is one of extreme dizziness.

I've been trying to lose myself in one of Gladwyn's late brochures on Lower Gila architecture, but I must be restless. Everything seems so still—so quiet—so insensate; in my tent, in the camp itself, and most of all in that brooding ruin beyond. There is no familiar hum of insects, none of the faint but commonplace evidence of nature to break the monotony of utter soundlessness in which this place seems wrapped.

The men have all gone to bed. Well, at least I can follow their example.

OCTOBER 11. On awaking this morning, I studiously avoided looking at the Ho-ho-kam bowl. I dressed without undue haste and went out for breakfast. But as I passed through the tent-flap I was unable to resist a swift backward glance. There it rested on my camp table. Again I felt a tightening along the nape of my neck, and I had a momentary urge to go back and examine the thing more thoroughly. Undeniably, there is a change in its appearance—though just what I cannot guess.

When I had finished eating, Jim Red-Cloud reluctantly informed me that the last of the encumbering fill had been removed from the mouth of the kiva.

"In that case," I directed, "I want you to start the men looking for a floor stratum in that watch-tower by the northern wall. But first fetch me a flashlight from the stores."

After the Pima herded the laborers off on their new job, I made my way over to the newly opened ceremonial chamber. Crouching down, I stared into the yawning entrance. Here was the holy of holies where the Ho-ho-kam had worshipped whatever fantastic gods they believed in. Here should be the tribal fetish entrusted to the care of the village witch-doctor. What time-hallowed secrets lay before me?

The rabbit-like burrow sloped sharply downward at a forty-degree angle, and I could discern nothing in the darkness within. For a moment I hesitated, look-

ing at the crumbling walls about me and drinking in the warm sunlight. The men were out of sight around a corner of the ruin, but I could hear the noise of their picks and shovels. Indeed, that was the only sound there was to be heard, other than my own quickened breath.

Sucking in a great gulp of air, like a pearl-diver about to plumb unknown depths, I switched on the flashlight and crawled into the sloping tunnel on hands and knees. It extended only a few yards, and I judged that the kiva was originally hollowed out to a depth of over fifteen feet. In a moment I was able to stand upright despite the dangerously sagging roof. My light cast a glowing spot on the retaining wall as it curved away on each side, but was not strong enough to illuminate the opposite edge of this circular crypt.

From the shaft behind came a dim filtering of daylight, but it penetrated only a few feet and served in no way to dispel the tenebrous gloom in which I found myself. It was silent as the grave. There was a pungent, charnel smell to the place, and a palpable sensation of something very old and very evil. No man could be blamed for turning tail and fleeing an atmosphere so pregnant with unnamable suggestion.

Forcing a laugh, I shrugged my shoulders nervously and played the light about the black interior. Huge beams of unbarked juniper, charred and splintered from some olden holocaust, strained in shaky support of the falling roof. Toward the center of the dusty floor were other great logs that had been crushed where the roof had sunken in under the weight of centuries, but it had not caved enough to admit even a thin gleam of outside light. Adobe-plastered rocks had given way here and there, shattering a number of corrugated cooking-pots that sat about a clay fire-pit.

Near the wall to my right was a round hole in the floor, covered with a perforated slab of sandstone. This was the *sipapu,* the place of the fetish, and regarded as the most sacred portion of the kiva. But it was vacant. Along the curving wall at intervals were cut niches, some holding small bowls full of turquoise beads, others with bone whistles and flutes, and one stack with prayer-sticks.

Slowly I started forward—only to stop suddenly as my foot scuffed something brittle. Bending down, I saw that it was a skeleton. From the dried bladders, bone-tubes and oddly painted feathers lying near by, I guessed the remains to be those of a medicine man. But the condition of the bones puzzled me. The arms and legs were horribly fractured, the spine cracked, and the ribs broken into little pieces. Something had exerted terrific pressure on this poor devil; a mangling machine could have done no more damage.

There were other, smaller bones strewn about the floor. Against the farther wall stood a great stone disk two or three feet in diameter, half closing an aperture of some sort. Evidently it formed a door that could be rolled open or shut. And even as I wondered what could possibly lie beyond it, I was conscious of a sinister rustling that seemed to emanate from behind the crude opening.

For a full minute I remained quiet, unmoving, a disconcerting chill gnawing at the small of my back. Did a faint scraping noise accompany that initial rustle?

I laughed again, shakily. Almost instantly an explanation occurred to me. Pack-rats, of course. All old Southwestern ruins were overrun with them. Growing bolder, I approached closer to that partly closed vent. Though I had forgot-

ten to count my paces, I concluded that the kiva was perhaps fifty feet in diameter. And now I had something else to worry about.

Whether it was due to Jim Red-Cloud's carelessness, or some other reason, apparently the batteries in my flashlight were anything but new. At this, of all times, they began to fail. The beam I focussed despairingly ahead of me commenced to weaken rapidly. As if it had been sustained wholly by that limited electric ray, my courage waned with it.

Still my curiosity drove me on to examine, if possible, that odd vent in the wall. I wanted to determine whether it was a ventilator or some kind of exit from this shaman's keep. In my haste I stumbled over a pile of feathered darts, and grasping at one of the roof-supports to regain my balance, I dropped the torch. Instantly I was plunged into darkness. From the aperture that gaped blackly before me came a sudden, heart-freezing whirr. It was like the sound of pebbles rattled in a gourd, only infinitely magnified. And as I froze to the floor, petrified with fear, it rose to a droning crescendo. A hiss like a blast of escaping steam stirred the damp hair on my head. Then again that dry, scraping rustle.

WITH a hoarse cry I broke the fetters of momentary paralysis. My hand dove for a pocket and emerged with several matches. Sobbing with a mad terror of the unknown, I scratched them against the roof-beam. A fountain of flame speared upward, casting back the horrific shadow that loomed toward me—and in the blazing glare I saw that it was no shadow.

Like some nightmare monstrosity out of elder spheres, a huge wedge-shaped head towered above me. It was white and scaly. Back of it thrashed an undulating body, coiling and twisting in palely mottled lengths that disappeared into the unplumbed depths of that orifice in the wall. And out of that unbelievable head, with jaws slaveringly agape, darted a foot-long forked tongue, flicking past simitar-like fangs. Fetid hisses poured out of a throat as thick as a man's body as the awful skull swayed aimlessly back and forth, seeking—seeking.

Cold sweat broke out on my brow and my eyes were held spellbound as I backed slowly away. I was afraid to wheel and run, for somehow I sensed that only the tenuous tongue of flame in my hand kept the monster uncertainly at bay. My gaze was riveted on those opaque, mercurial orbs. In some obscure way I realized that the light hurt them. The creature was blind, or almost so, and the flickering glow of the matches was torturing to its hypersensitive optic nerves.

Catfooting backward, I prayed fervently that I would not trip over the litter on the floor. Fumblingly, I felt for more matches as I played my part in that slowest of all races against time. Those flimsy wood slivers do not burn for ever. And as the noisome body uncoiled and flattened out to slide purposefully after me, I saw with a twinge of horror a pair of atrophied, membranous wings sprouting out of the corpse-hued trunk.

The fire in my trembling hand was burning low; I could feel the dying flame scorch my fingertips, yet doggedly I held on. That feral head with its lidless, unpupiled eyes lashed closer. The forked tongue licked out hungrily, and from those wicked in-curving fangs dripped a slobber of venom. All the while that frenzied rattling increased, vibrating against my eardrums like gigantic castanets in a dance of death. And in the only pocket I could reach there were no more matches.

With the blood in my veins turned to sleet, I watched the last faint spark in my hand snuff itself out. Turning with a wild cry as blackness swooped in on bat-like wings, I dove frantically for the thin glow of the entrance shaft. There was a heavy thud in the spot where I had stood, a jar that shook the foundation of the ancient kiva and caused the caving roof to settle even lower. As I scrambled up the sloping tunnel toward the blessed sunlight, I heard a hideous scraping sound. But whether it was caused by my boots slipping on the rubble—or something else—I shall never know.

Later (near midnight). Writing down the above account of my horrible experience this morning has recalled it all too vividly to mind. I know that in countless nightmares to come I shall live again and again that insane dash for the outer world. Fortunately none of the men saw me when I emerged white-faced and shaken from that tomb-like place. I staggered to my tent, poured out a generous tot of brandy, and sank weakly into a camp chair. Then I buried my sweating face in my palms and tried to reason the thing out.

I am still trying. There is no doubt in my mind as to what I saw. It was a serpent, and a colossal one. Nor am I attempting exaggeration when I state that beside it a thirty-foot python would look like a gartersnake. Yet the fearsome rattling that accompanied its angry attack seems to denote a crotalic ancestry. Although it seemed like an eternity, the whole episode could not have lasted more than a few seconds. But as I set down these words I can see again those awful eyes, lusterless and dead—eyes the color of unexposed photographic film—a film in which is concentrated all the pitiless wisdom of the universe.

Can it be possible that an ordinary rattlesnake, penned up in a buried, rock-lined crypt, could grow to such unbelievable size? Hidden underground for God knows how many centuries — no wonder it had bleached to that dead hue. Of one thing I feel certain: it is mortally afraid of light, or it would have followed me out into the open. No doubt the sun has a painful effect on its purblind eyes and slimy skin.

Another thing occurs to me: what in the world does it feed upon? But even as I ask the question, I seem to find an answer in the curiously lifeless zone that surrounds the entire ruin. With an instinct keener than that of man, the wild animals of the region have learned to give the plateau a wide berth. Likely enough, that area is constantly increasing. For whether the thing is an unnatural development of ordinary herpetological existence, or is some long-lived monstrosity brought out of unexplored Sonora by the ancient Ho-ho-kam priests, there is a crawling horror on Superstition Mountain.

OCTOBER 12. It was late when I opened my eyes this morning, and the sunlight was streaming into my tent. Queer how the sun can lift a man's spirits! Last night I was a cowering wretch, assailed by doubts and fears that took no coherent form. But today I was a new person. I was even beginning to feel somewhat exhilarated by the scientific importance of my discoveries.

Jim Red-Cloud came in with coffee, toast and simmering bacon and eggs. That sullen expression of ill-concealed fear was still etched on his aquiline features, and he responded almost curtly to my greeting. He carried the food over to the camp table. Watching him idly, I saw him suddenly stiffen. His coppery face paled. Like a falcon he pounced on

the red-on-buff bowl and held it up in shaking hands.

"Yig—Yig-Satuti!" he quavered, his black eyes rolling fearfully. "Look!" he screamed, pointing a claw-like finger at the painted pictures. *"The Great Snake has moved!"*

"What?" I cried, jumping up.

Rudely, I grabbed the bowl from him. God in heaven! Now I knew what was wrong with the damned thing—what had been vaguely disturbing me the past few days. The distance between the figure of the winged rattlesnake and that of the fleeing human seemed to have shrunk. It looked as if the pursuing reptile had gained on the terrified man.

My hands trembled even as did Jim Red-Cloud's. But I tried to take a grip on myself. Somewhere, somehow, there must be a mistake. Perhaps my eyes——

"Nonsense, Jim!" I grated, in a voice unnecessarily harsh. "You're getting to be a typical old woman with your crazy superstitions about this mountain and your Yig-Satuti. And now — this old pot!"

For a moment the Pima's fright dropped from him. He drew himself up with unconscious dignity.

"The Great Snake has crept closer to the man," he insisted stolidly. "I warned you it was bad medicine to come to this place. You are only trying to deceive yourself, Mr. Shirley. Soon the serpent will swallow up the fleeing man. And then——" His voice trailed off, horribly suggestive.

"You're crazy!" I retorted impatiently. "I'll settle this once for all."

From a pile of duffle I pulled a camera. The Indian watched unemotionally while I loaded it. With his aid I moved the camp table out into the sunlight, and arranged the bowl so that both figures were visible to the lens. Then I backed away a few paces and peered into the reflector for the proper focus. A cold feeling settled over me like a wet shroud. In the finder I could see both the writhing reptile and the running man. And I clearly remembered noticing, when Jim Red-Cloud first brought the thing into my tent, that the pictures were on opposite sides of the round vessel!

Numbly, my fingers clicked the shutter. With a dazed sense of unreality I took four or five additional exposures, while the Pima stood stoically by.

"Now," I said, closing the camera, "these photographs will be one-quarter actual size. They will definitely settle any question as to the distance between the pictures."

The Indian said nothing, but I could read the doubt in his eyes as he strode off to resume the work in the north tower. Going back to my tent, I finished up my breakfast. Then, strapping a heavy forty-five about my hips, I walked over toward the mouth of the kiva. For a while I studied it, safe in the full glare of the desert sun. If I had dynamite, I know what I'd have done with it.

After pondering a few minutes, I continued on to the tower to view the progress of the excavation. Jim Red-Cloud was on his hands and knees, following with a trowel a stratum of hard-packed adobe that looked very much like a floor. One or two of the men were throwing out the dirt he loosened, but the rest were standing idle. Their sullenness had not left them, and I noticed a gleam come into their eyes as they fell on the gun at my side.

Beckoning the loafers to follow me, I returned to the opening that sloped down into the kiva.

"Fill it up," I ordered.

For a moment they stared as if they

had not heard. Then they went to work with a will.

(Later.) Tonight after dinner I developed the film-pack from the camera. Before turning in I'll hang the negatives up to dry.

OCTOBER 13. Naturally, the first thing my glance fell on when I awoke this morning was the red-on-buff bowl. Its eery pictures have become pointedly significant since my adventure in the kiva. A primal sense of unquenchable fear swept over me. My eyes smarted, as if they felt an acute physical pang merely in telegraphing the incredible evidence to my brain.

God help me, those pictures *are* closer! There can be no question of it. Slowly but surely, the snake is creeping up on the human figure.

I lay for a moment shuddering in my blankets, attacked by a fearful revulsion. What can it all mean? Am I going insane?

Finally, I forced myself to get up and examine the negatives hanging from the ridgepole. They were dry as I held them up to the light. But, if anything, they only prove that I am going crazy—or that something is frightfully, unbelievably wrong.

Allowing for the difference in size between the original and the photographs, it is only too plain that the ratio of distance between the pictures painted on the bowl and those appearing on the film is not the same. On the pottery the intervening space has shrunk to half of what it was yesterday.

At this moment, Jim Red-Cloud came in to inquire if I was breakfasting at the campfire or in my tent. Before I could reply, his eyes fell on the bowl. A low, keening sound issued from his lips, like the weird death-chant of a captured warrior at an enemy stake. His mouth worked as if forming unutterable syllables. Then, grabbing up the pottery, he wheeled abruptly and darted outside.

For an instant I was stunned. Then I grew angry. This had gone far enough. Mechanically, I donned my clothes. Then I strode over toward the ruin.

I found them in the watch-tower. Jim Red-Cloud was the center of an excited group of lean, bronze faces. He was exhorting them in their own tongue, and holding up the red-on-buff bowl so that all could see it. Stark superstitious fear distorted each dark countenance. One big buck began to chant a tribal ghost song; another made cabalistic markings in the dust with a twig.

"Give me that thing," I demanded wrathfully, jerking the bowl out of Jim Red-Cloud's hands. "Now get to work, all of you. What do you think I'm paying you for?"

An uncertain shuffling of feet followed my outburst. At the unveiled hostility that swept over those dark features, my hand dropped to my gun.

"No, there will be no more work."

I wasn't sure which of the men uttered those words, weighted with finality. But I turned again to the foreman.

"I'm sorry, Mr. Shirley," he muttered, his gaze dropping sullenly before my own. "The men refuse to go on. They say we have violated the sanctuary of the Ancient One. They are afraid of his vengeance. Others have come to this place before, and have never been seen again by living men."

"Sanctuary my eye!" I snorted, more hotly than elegantly. "You Pimas are not related in any way to the lost people who built this place. Do you realize that this is the biggest scientific discovery since

Pueblo Bonito? It'll make us all famous. Now pick up your shovels and get back to work."

Without waiting to see the result of my words, I stalked angrily away. Nor did I go near the tower again for the rest of the day. It is my belief that they consider my presence here more of a blasphemy than their own. Perhaps if I leave them to think it over they will go on with the work.

After dinner tonight I made a number of prints from the negatives of the red-on-buff bowl. Spreading them out to dry, I sat down to write up my notes. If the lines seem blurred it is because I cannot control an unaccountable palsy of my hands. My head is throbbing so it seems about to burst. I can't write any more tonight. After all, what is there to write?

OCTOBER 14. Somehow I feel that today marks a high tide in my life. Don't ask me to explain; I can't.

Everything was strangely still when I awoke. I lay for some moments watching the bright bar of sunlight that streamed through the flap of my tent. Subconsciously, my ears were straining for the usual sounds of a camp at morning—the bustle of Jim Red-Cloud preparing breakfast, the clatter of cooking-utensils, the subdued voices of hungry men, and the tread of heavy boots. But none of these familiar sounds came to me, and I sensed that something was wrong.

Leaping out of bed, I began to dress. And as I struggled into my clothes my eyes sought out the red-on-buff bowl on my camp table. Suddenly the warmth went out of the sunlight, and to the stillness of the camp was added a brooding sense of foreboding. On the dull buff surface of the ancient pottery the Great Snake had almost caught up to the fleeing man! There was less than an inch of space between the two painted figures.

"Jim!" I shrieked hoarsely. "Jim Red-Cloud!"

There was no answer. Dashing outside, I looked wildly around. Not a soul was in sight. Nor could I hear the sound of implements coming from the ruin. Under the cook-stove the ashes were cold and dead. Assailed by an overwhelming premonition, I ran toward the tents and peered into each in turn. They were all vacant.

Slowly, the truth was borne in upon me. The men had gone—deserted in a body, along with Jim Red-Cloud, my trusted foreman. Nothing else was missing—not an item of food, nor a weapon. They had not even paused to claim the wages already due them.

A dreadful sense of impending doom settled over me. Here I was, left alone on this sinister mountain, abandoned to the mercies of the horrific haunter of a moldering village.

I laughed bitterly. Suddenly a perverse determination took hold of me. Was I going to give up this work, the greatest of my career, in the face of a primitive superstition? Here was my chance to immortalize my name in the annals of science. My jaw set stubbornly. And here I intended to stay.

(Near midnight.) It was getting dark as I returned to camp this evening. I've been over the entire ruin, setting out numbered stakes preliminary to surveying the site with tape and transit. Coming in, I skirted the closed mouth of the kiva, unconsciously hastening my steps. Could the men have suspected its awful occupant?

After rustling up a supper, I retired to my tent to jot down these notes. Here under canvas the atmosphere should be

cheering. Owing to the glare of the gasoline lamp there are no shadows such as crawl about the deserted camp outside. Nevertheless, I am uneasy. I don't know just why. It'll be a great relief when my friend Forsythe joins me.

I had hoped that writing these lines would take my mind off—other things. Why should I feel uneasy? After all, the entrance to the kiva has been filled in.

Just now I noticed that the light from the lamp seems a bit weaker. Running out of gasoline, I suppose—and the store tent is at the other side of camp. It's pretty dark out there. Perhaps there's enough fuel left to last me for the rest of the night. The night . . . what a craven creature man becomes when the sun has set—his unescapable heritage from a troglodytic past!

Good God! [Here the page is splashed with a great blot of ink and some of the words are almost illegible, as if the writer suffered a sudden shock.] I just glanced at the red-on-buff bowl. As heaven is my witness, the snake has fastened its fangs in the fleeing man's heel!

I th—— [There are several words crossed out at this point, as if the writer made a number of false starts. The diary takes up a few lines down.]

I had to stop a moment—to pour myself a bit of brandy. But it's true . . . it's true, unless I am stark, raving mad. It's getting harder to see in here. That damned Pima—how long is it since he refilled my lamp? There's only a faint glow left.

Well, I can go to bed. To bed.

What am I so afraid of? Isn't the kiva closed? Ah, God, but is it? What of that vent in the wall behind the half-rolled stone disk? And the deathly area in which this camp is——

[Here the frenzied lines blur and some of the words are indistinguishable.]

. . . can't it come forth by night? Yig . . . fraid of light. The light—there . . . goes. Matches . . . where are . . . matches? What . . . that queer scraping . . . outside . . . tent? Christ protect . . . Yig! Yig-Satu——

HERE Shirley's diary ends. The last word, incomplete and scarcely recognizable, is scrawled out over half the page. And as I close, with these few lines, the strange case of Fulton Shirley, that weird red-on-buff bowl sits on the desk before me. But there is only one picture painted on its surface now, the same that Sheriff Dawson remarked when he dug it from the archeologist's wrecked tent over a year ago.

It is the bloated likeness of a huge winged rattlesnake, with jaws slaveringly agape. *But from those wicked jaws dangles a futile human arm!*

"His head and body seemed but an empty hull."

The Death of Ilalotha

By CLARK ASHTON SMITH

What horrible fate awaited Thulos as he went to keep his love-tryst with Ilalotha in the tomb?—the story of a lamia

Black Lord of bale and fear, master of all confusion!
By thee, thy prophet saith,
New power is given to wizards after death,
And witches in corruption draw forbidden breath
And weave such wild enchantment and illusion
As none but lamiæ may use;
And through thy grace the charneled corpses lose
Their horror, and nefandous loves are lighted
In noisome vaults long nighted;
And vampires make their sacrifice to thee—
Disgorging blood as if great urns had poured
Their bright vermilion hoard
About the washed and weltering sarcophagi.

—*Ludar's Litany to Thasaidon.*

ACCORDING to the custom in old Tasuun, the obsequies of Ilalotha, lady-in-waiting to the self-widowed Queen Xantlicha, had formed an occasion of much merrymaking and prolonged festivity. For three days, on a bier of diverse-colored silks from the Orient, under a rose-hued canopy that might well have domed some nuptial couch, she had lain clad with gala garments amid

the great feasting-hall of the royal palace in Miraab. About her, from morning dusk to sunset, from cool even to torridly glaring dawn, the feverish tide of the funeral orgies had surged and eddied without slackening. Nobles, court officials, guardsmen, scullions, astrologers, eunuchs, and all the high ladies, waiting-women and female slaves of Xantlicha, had taken part in that prodigal debauchery which was believed to honor most fitly the deceased. Mad songs and obscene ditties were sung, and dancers whirled in vertiginous frenzy to the lascivious pleading of untirable lutes. Wines and liquors were poured torrentially from monstrous amphoras; the tables fumed with spicy meats piled in huge hummocks and for ever replenished. The drinkers offered libation to Ilalotha, till the fabrics of her bier were stained to darker hues by the spilt vintages. On all sides around her, in attitudes of disorder or prone abandonment, lay those who had yielded to amorous license or the fullness of their potations. With half-shut eyes and lips slightly parted, in the rosy shadow cast by the catafalque, she bore no aspect of death but seemed a sleeping empress who ruled impartially over the living and the dead. This appearance, together with a strange heightening of her natural beauty, was remarked by many: and some said that she seemed to await a lover's kiss rather than the kisses of the worm.

On the third evening, when the many-tongued brazen lamps were lit and the rites drew to their end, there returned to court the Lord Thulos, acknowledged lover of Queen Xantlicha, who had gone a week previous to visit his domain on the western border and had heard nothing of Ilalotha's death. Still unaware, he came into the hall at that hour when the saturnalia began to flag and the fallen revelers to outnumber those who still moved and drank and made riot.

He viewed the disordered hall with little surprize, for such scenes were familiar to him from childhood. Then, approaching the bier, he recognized its occupant with a certain startlement. Among the numerous ladies of Miraab who had drawn his libertine affections, Ilalotha had held sway longer than most; and, it was said, she had grieved more passionately over his defection than any other. She had been superseded a month before by Xantlicha, who had shown favor to Thulos in no ambiguous manner; and Thulos, perhaps, had abandoned her not without regret: for the role of lover to the queen, though advantageous and not wholly disagreeable, was somewhat precarious. Xantlicha, it was universally believed, had rid herself of the late King Archain by means of a tomb-discovered vial of poison that owed its peculiar subtlety and virulence to the art of ancient sorcerers. Following this act of disposal, she had taken many lovers, and those who failed to please her came invariably to ends no less violent than that of Archain. She was exigent, exorbitant, demanding a strict fidelity somewhat irksome to Thulos; who, pleading urgent affairs on his remote estate, had been glad enough of a week away from court.

Now, as he stood beside the dead woman, Thulos forgot the queen and bethought him of certain summer nights that had been honeyed by the fragrance of jasmine and the jasmine-white beauty of Ilalotha. Even less than the others could he believe her dead: for her present aspect differed in no wise from that which she had often assumed during their old intercourse. To please his whim, she had feigned the inertness and complaisance of slumber or death; and at such times he had loved her with an ardor undismayed by the pantherine

vehemence with which, at other whiles, she was wont to reciprocate or invite his caresses.

MOMENT by moment, as if through the working of some powerful necromancy, there grew upon him a curious hallucination, and it seemed that he was again the lover of those lost nights, and had entered that bower in the palace gardens where Ilalotha waited him on a couch strewn with overblown petals, lying with bosom quiet as her face and hands. No longer was he aware of the crowded hall: the high-flaring lights, the wine-flushed faces, had become a moon-bright parterre of drowsily nodding blossoms, and the voices of the courtiers were no more than a faint suspiration of wind amid cypress and jasmine. The warm, aphrodisiac perfumes of the June night welled about him; and again, as of old, it seemed that they arose from the person of Ilalotha no less than from the flowers. Prompted by intense desire, he stooped over and felt her cool arm stir involuntarily beneath his kiss.

Then, with the bewilderment of a sleep-walker awakened rudely, he heard a voice that hissed in his ear with soft venom: "Hast forgotten thyself, my Lord Thulos? Indeed, I wonder little, for many of my bawcocks deem that she is fairer in death than in life." And, turning from Ilalotha, while the weird spell dissolved from his senses, he found Xantlicha at his side. Her garments were disarrayed, her hair was unbound and disheveled, and she reeled slightly, clutching him by the shoulder with sharp-nailed fingers. Her full, poppy-crimson lips were curled by a vixenish fury, and in her long-lidded yellow eyes there blazed the jealousy of an amorous cat.

Thulos, overwhelmed by a strange confusion, remembered but partially the enchantment to which he had succumbed; and he was unsure whether or not he had actually kissed Ilalotha and had felt her flesh quiver to his mouth. Verily, he thought, this thing could not have been, and a waking dream had momentarily seized him. But he was troubled by the words of Xantlicha and her anger, and by the half-furtive drunken laughters and ribald whispers that he heard passing among the people about the hall.

"Beware, my Thulos," the queen murmured, her strange anger seeming to subside; "for men say that she was a witch"

"How did she die?" queried Thulos.

"From no other fever than that of love, it is rumored."

"Then, surely, she was no witch," Thulos argued with a lightness that was far from his thoughts and feelings; "for true sorcery should have found the cure."

"It was from love of thee," said Xantlicha darkly; "and, as all women know, thy heart is blacker and harder than black adamant. No witchcraft, however potent, could prevail thereon." Her mood, as she spoke, appeared to soften suddenly. "Thy absence has been long, my lord. Come to me at midnight: I will wait for thee in the south pavilion."

Then, eyeing him sultrily for an instant from under drooped lids, and pinching his arm in such manner that her nails pierced through cloth and skin like a cat's talons, she turned from Thulos to hail certain of the harem-eunuchs.

Thulos, when the queen's attention was disengaged from him, ventured to look again at Ilalotha; pondering, meanwhile, the curious remarks of Xantlicha. He knew that Ilalotha, like many of the court-ladies, had dabbled in spells and philtres; but her witchcraft had never concerned him, since he felt no interest in other charms or enchantments than those with which nature had endowed the bodies of women. And it was quite

impossible for him to believe that Ilalotha had died from a fatal passion: since, in his experience, passion was never fatal.

Indeed, as he regarded her with confused emotions, he was again beset by the impression that she had not died at all. There was no repetition of the weird, half-remembered hallucination of other time and place; but it seemed to him that she had stirred from her former position on the wine-stained bier, turning her face toward him a little, as a woman turns to an expected lover; that the arm he had kissed (either in dream or reality) was outstretched a little farther from her side.

Thulos bent nearer, fascinated by the mystery and drawn by a stranger attraction that he could not have named. Again, surely, he had dreamt or had been mistaken. But even as the doubt grew, it seemed that the bosom of Ilalotha stirred in faint respiration, and he heard an almost inaudible but thrilling whisper: "Come to me at midnight. I will wait for thee . . . in the tomb."

At this instant there appeared beside the catafalque certain people in the sober and rusty raiment of sextons, who had entered the hall silently, unperceived by Thulos or by any of the company. They carried among them a thin-walled sarcophagus of newly welded and burnished bronze. It was their office to remove the dead woman and bear her to the sepulchral vaults of her family, which were situated in the old necropolis lying somewhat to northward of the palace-gardens.

Thulos would have cried out to restrain them from their purpose; but his tongue clove tightly; nor could he move any of his members. Not knowing whether he slept or woke, he watched the people of the cemetery as they placed Ilalotha in the sarcophagus and bore her quickly from the hall, unfollowed and still unheeded by the drowsy bacchanalians. Only when the somber cortège had departed was he able to stir from his position by the empty bier. His thoughts were sluggish, and full of darkness and indecision. Smitten by an immense fatigue that was not unnatural after his day-long journey, he withdrew to his apartments and fell instantly into death-deep slumber.

FREEING itself gradually from the cypress-boughs, as if from the long, stretched fingers of witches, a waning and misshapen moon glared horizontally through the eastern window when Thulos awoke. By this token, he knew that the hour drew toward midnight, and recalled the assignation which Queen Xantlicha had made with him: an assignation which he could hardly break without incurring the queen's deadly displeasure. Also, with singular clearness, he recalled another rendezvous . . . at the same time but in a different place. Those incidents and impressions of Ilalotha's funeral, which, at the time, had seemed so dubitable and dream-like, returned to him with a profound conviction of reality, as if etched on his mind by some mordant chemistry of sleep . . . or the strengthening of some sorcerous charm. He felt that Ilalotha had indeed stirred on her bier and spoken to him; that the sextons had borne her still living to the tomb. Perhaps her supposed demise had been merely a sort of catalepsy; or else she had deliberately feigned death in a last effort to revive his passion. These thoughts awoke within him a raging fever of curiosity and desire; and he saw before him her pale, inert, luxurious beauty, presented as if by enchantment.

Direly distraught, he went down by the lampless stairs and hallways to the moonlit labyrinth of the gardens. He cursed the untimely exigence of Xantlicha. However, as he told himself, it was

more than likely that the queen, continuing to imbibe the liquors of Tasuun, had long since reached a condition in which she would neither keep nor recall her appointment. This thought reassured him: in his queerly bemused mind, it soon became a certainty; and he did not hasten toward the south pavilion but strolled vaguely amid the wan and somber boscage.

More and more it seemed unlikely that any but himself was abroad: for the long, unlit wings of the palace sprawled as in vacant stupor; and in the gardens there were only dead shadows, and pools of still fragrance in which the winds had drowned. And over all, like a pale, monstrous poppy, the moon distilled her death-white slumber.

Thulos, no longer mindful of his rendezvous with Xantlicha, yielded without further reluctance to the urgence that drove him toward another goal. . . . Truly, it was no less than obligatory that he should visit the vaults and learn whether or not he had been deceived in his belief concerning Ilalotha. Perhaps, if he did not go, she would stifle in the shut sarcophagus, and her pretended death would quickly become an actuality. Again, as if spoken in the moonlight before him, he heard the words she had whispered, or seemed to whisper, from the bier: "Come to me at midnight . . . I will wait for thee . . . in the tomb."

With the quickening steps and pulses of one who fares to the warm, petal-sweet couch of an adored mistress, he left the palace-grounds by an unguarded northern postern and crossed the weedy common between the royal gardens and the old cemetery. Unchilled and undismayed, he entered those always-open portals of death, where ghoul-headed monsters of black marble, glaring with hideously pitted eyes, maintained their charnel postures before the crumbling pylons.

The very stillness of the low-bosomed graves, the rigor and pallor of the tall shafts, the deepness of bedded cypress shadows, the inviolacy of death by which all things were invested, served to heighten the singular excitement that had fired Thulos' blood. It was as if he had drunk a philtre spiced with mummia. All around him the mortuary silence seemed to burn and quiver with a thousand memories of Ilalotha, together with those expectations to which he had given as yet no formal image. . . .

Once, with Ilalotha, he had visited the subterranean tomb of her ancestors; and, recalling its situation clearly, he came without indirection to the low-arched and cedar-darkened entrance. Rank nettles and fetid fumitories, growing thickly about the seldom-used adit, were crushed down by the tread of those who had entered there before Thulos; and the rusty, iron-wrought door sagged heavily inward on its loose hinges. At his feet there lay an extinguished flambeau, dropped, no doubt, by one of the departing sextons. Seeing it, he realized that he had brought with him neither candle nor lantern for the exploration of the vaults, and found in that providential torch an auspicious omen.

Bearing the lit flambeau, he began his investigation. He gave no heed to the piled and dusty sarcophagi in the first reaches of the subterrane: for, during their past visit, Ilalotha had shown to him a niche at the innermost extreme, where, in due time, she herself would find sepulture among the members of that decaying line. Strangely, insidiously, like the breath of some vernal garden, the languid and luscious odor of jasmine swam to meet him through the musty air, amid the tiered presence of the dead; and it drew him to the sarcophagus that stood open between others tightly lidded. There he beheld Ilalotha lying in the

gay garments of her funeral, with half-shut eyes and half-parted lips; and upon her was the same weird and radiant beauty, the same voluptuous pallor and stillness, that had drawn Thulos with a necromantic charm.

"I knew that thou wouldst come, O Thulos," she murmured, stirring a little, as if involuntarily, beneath the deepening ardor of his kisses that passed quickly from throat to bosom. . . .

The torch that had fallen from Thulos' hand expired in the thick dust. . . .

XANTLICHA, retiring to her chamber betimes, had slept illy. Perhaps she had drunk too much or too little of the dark, ardent vintages; perhaps her blood was fevered by the return of Thulos, and her jealousy still troubled by the hot kiss which he had laid on Ilalotha's arm during the obsequies. A restlessness was upon her; and she rose well before the hour of her meeting with Thulos, and stood at her chamber window seeking such coolness as the night air might afford.

The air, however, seemed heated as by the burning of hidden furnaces; her heart appeared to swell in her bosom and stifle her; and her unrest and agitation were increased rather than diminished by the spectacle of the moon-lulled gardens. She would have hurried forth to the tryst in the pavilion; but, despite her impatience, she thought it well to keep Thulos waiting. Leaning thus from her sill, she beheld Thulos when he passed amid the parterres and arbors below. She was struck by the unusual haste and intentness of his steps, and she wondered at their direction, which could bring him only to places remote from the rendezvous she had named. He disappeared from her sight in the cypress-lined alley that led to the north garden-gate; and her wonderment was soon mingled with alarm and anger when he did not return.

It was incomprehensible to Xantlicha that Thulos, or any man, would dare to forget the tryst in his normal senses; and seeking an explanation, she surmised that the working of some baleful and potent sorcery was probably involved. Nor, in the light of certain incidents that she had observed, and much else that had been rumored, was it hard for her to identify the possible sorceress. Ilalotha, the queen knew, had loved Thulos to the point of frenzy, and had grieved inconsolably after his desertion of her. People said that she had wrought various ineffectual spells to bring him back; that she had vainly invoked demons and sacrificed to them, and had made futile invultuations and death-charms against Xantlicha. In the end, she had died of sheer chagrin and despair, or perhaps had slain herself with some undetected poison. . . . But, as was commonly believed in Tasuun, a witch dying thus, with unslaked desires and frustrate cantraips, could turn herself into a lamia or vampire and procure thereby the consummation of all her sorceries. . . .

The queen shuddered, remembering these things; and remembering also the hideous and malign transformation that was said to accompany the achievement of such ends: for those who used in this manner the power of hell must take on the very character and the actual semblance of infernal beings. Too well she surmised the destination of Thulos, and the danger to which he had gone forth if her suspicions were true. And, knowing that she might face an equal danger, Xantlicha determined to follow him.

She made little preparation, for there was no time to waste; but took from beneath her silken bed-cushions a small, straight-bladed dagger that she kept always within reach. The dagger had been

anointed from point to hilt with such venom as was believed efficacious against either the living or the dead. Bearing it in her right hand, and carrying in the other a slot-eyed lantern that she might require later, Xantlicha stole swiftly from the palace.

The last lees of the evening's wine ebbed wholly from her brain, and dim, ghastly fears awoke, warning her like the voices of ancestral phantoms. But, firm in her determination, she followed the path taken by Thulos; the path taken earlier by those sextons who had borne Ilalotha to her place of sepulture. Hovering from tree to tree, the moon accompanied her like a worm-hollowed visage. The soft, quick patter of her cothurns, breaking the white silence, seemed to tear the filmy cobweb pall that withheld from her a world of spectral abominations. And more and more she recalled, of those legendries that concerned such beings as Ilalotha; and her heart was shaken within her: for she knew that she would meet no mortal woman but a thing raised up and inspirited by the seventh hell. But amid the chill of these horrors, the thought of Thulos in the lamia's arms was like a red brand that seared her bosom.

Now the necropolis yawned before Xantlicha, and her path entered the cavernous gloom of far-vaulted funereal trees, as if passing into monstrous and shadowy mouths that were tusked with white monuments. The air grew dank and noisome, as if filled with the breathings of open crypts. Here the queen faltered, for it seemed that black, unseen cacodemons rose all about her from the graveyard ground, towering higher than the shafts and boles, and standing in readiness to assail her if she went farther. Nevertheless, she came anon to the dark adit that she sought. Tremulously she lit the wick of the slot-eyed lantern; and, piercing the gross underground darkness before her with its bladed beam, she passed with ill-subdued terror and repugnance into that abode of the dead . . . and perchance of the Undead.

However, as she followed the first turnings of the catacomb, it seemed that she was to encounter nothing more abhorrent than charnel mold and century-sifted dust; nothing more formidable than the serried sarcophagi that lined the deeply hewn shelves of stone; sarcophagi that had stood silent and undisturbed ever since the time of their deposition. Here, surely the slumber of all the dead was unbroken, and the nullity of death was inviolate.

Almost the queen doubted that Thulos had preceded her there; till, turning her light on the ground, she discerned the print of his poulaines, long-tipped and slender in the deep dust amid those footmarks left by the rudely shod sextons. And she saw that the footprints of Thulos pointed only in one direction, while those of the others plainly went and returned.

Then, at an undetermined distance in the shadows ahead, Xantlicha heard a sound in which the sick moaning of some amorous woman was blent with a snarling as of jackals over their meat. Her blood returned frozen upon her heart as she went onward step by slow step, clutching her dagger in a hand drawn sharply back, and holding the light high in advance. The sound grew louder and more distinct; and there came to her now a perfume as of flowers in some warm June night; but, as she still advanced, the perfume was mixed with more and more of a smothering foulness such as she had never heretofore known, and was touched with the reeking of blood.

A few paces more, and Xantlicha stood

as if a demon's arm had arrested her: for her lantern's light had found the inverted face and upper body of Thulos, hanging from the end of a burnished, new-wrought sarcophagus that occupied a scant interval between others green with rust. One of Thulos' hands clutched rigidly the rim of the sarcophagus, while the other hand, moving feebly, seemed to caress a dim shape that leaned above him with arms showing jasmine-white in the narrow beam, and dark fingers plunging into his bosom. His head and body seemed but an empty hull, and his hand hung skeleton-thin on the bronze rim, and his whole aspect was vein-drawn, as if he had lost more blood than was evident on his torn throat and face, and in his sodden raiment and dripping hair.

From the thing stooping above Thulos, there came ceaselessly that sound which was half moan and half snarl. And as Xantlicha stood in petrific fear and loathing, she seemed to hear from Thulos' lips an indistinct murmur, more of ecstasy than pain. The murmur ceased, and his head hung slacklier than before, so that the queen deemed him verily dead. At this she found such wrathful courage as enabled her to step nearer and raise the lantern higher: for, even amid her extreme panic, it came to her that by means of the wizard-poisoned dagger she might still haply slay the thing that had slain Thulos.

Waveringly the light crept aloft, disclosing inch by inch that infamy which Thulos had caressed in the darkness. . . . It crept even to the crimson-smeared wattles, and the fanged and ruddled orifice that was half mouth and half beak . . . till Xantlicha knew why the body of Thulos was a mere shrunken hull. . . . In what the queen saw, there remained nothing of Ilalotha except the white, voluptuous arms, and a vague outline of human breasts melting momently into breasts that were not human, like clay molded by a demon sculptor. The arms too began to change and darken; and, as they changed, the dying hand of Thulos stirred again and fumbled with a caressing movement toward the horror. And the thing seemed to heed him not but withdrew its fingers from his bosom, and reached across him with members stretching enormously, as if to claw the queen or fondle her with its dribbling talons.

It was than that Xantlicha let fall the lantern and the dagger, and ran with shrill, endless shriekings and laughters of immitigable madness from the vault.

"What he found was one of the queerest things he ever set eyes on."

The Abyss Under the World

By J. PAUL SUTER

An amazing tale about three men who were precipitated into a series of adventures as astounding as any that ever befell mortal men

The Story Thus Far

WHEN Stubbs, Reverend McGregor Daunt's man-servant, flashed by driving his master's car, Chief of Police Jim Kerns forgot the rankling interview he had just had with Lefronti, the cynical "dope king." Kerns commandeered a taxi. Stubbs's car stopped at a blazing house on the river front. Accompanied by a strange, monkey-like

This story began in WEIRD TALES for August

creature, Stubbs jumped from the seat. Kerns followed—too late. Stubbs and the other had plunged into the flames.

Three days later, Daunt, searching the ruins with Kerns, fell through a trapdoor into an underground vault. Kerns promptly followed, but they were trapped. Water slowly filled the vault. They swam, frantically. They fought for air. In vain. The deadly water crushed out consciousness.

Daunt awoke into what he at first thought was a dream. He lay on the street in what seemed an ancient Egyptian city. His knowledge of ancient times identified it. A huge Negro slave grinned down at him. Soon, a chariot pulled up. Stubbs and Kerns were in it—in Egyptian costume! Certainly a dream! But they told him that this was an underground city. The citizens killed all strangers, but first let them drive about the city, since there was no escape. Pursued by other chariots, Stubbs drove up the steps of a vast temple, only to find a priest of Horus awaiting them inside. They were delivered up for sacrifice: to be scratched to death as they ran between two lines of men and women. Unexpectedly, the priest himself beckoned them through a secret doorway, and they were saved.

The way of escape was fearful. The priest led them down a narrow, rocky path, at the side of a bottomless abyss, filled with weird, silvery light. They rounded a corner of the rocky wall; the path became a narrow spur of rock, curving and trembling into space. Beyond the dizzy end of this lay an opening in the rock, only to be reached by jumping. They jumped. That way, the priest said, was their world. As for him, since he had saved their lives, he dared not return to his. A man of their world had once saved his. Now—good-bye! He leapt into the abyss. Minutes afterward, from somewhere in the far purple depths, his voice came back to them in a long cry of greeting and farewell.

The story continues:

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5. The Clue of the Mind

For the Reverend MacGregor Daunt, what came then was blackness. Chandra's death-cry echoed in the blackness, and died away. Something followed which was like a confused battle in which he was partly a fighter, partly a member of a detached audience. He was arguing violently. He was insisting on something. Along with the impression of struggle the curious feeling persisted that he lay in a hospital bed; that he sat up in the bed and argued clearly and forcefully, with Kerns and with others who were gathered around him. He won the argument. Whatever it was that he wanted, he had his way. But when his mind cleared, he was not in bed. He was in a boat on a river.

He looked about him. He was in a police boat, which was swiftly cleaving its way through sunshine-bathed waters. Kerns and big Doctor Quimby, of St. Brandan's Hospital, were sitting directly in front of him, looking at him with interest and sympathy.

Daunt passed a hand uncertainly over his forehead.

"Where am I?" he asked.

Quimby shot a glance full of meaning at the interested police chief.

"Feeling better, Reverend Daunt?" he inquired, gently.

Daunt did not reply. Something within was shouting to him that it was important—that it was vital—to have an answer to his own question. He turned stern eyes on Kerns.

"What has happened?" he demanded. "Tell me everything. Tell me now."

Kerns gulped, uncomfortably. He looked to the big doctor for advice. Daunt screamed at him:

"*Will* you tell me? Do you realize that the time you are wasting may mean life or death?"

Even as he said it, he wondered why it might mean life or death. But his fury had its effect. Kerns burst into a torrent of words.

"They picked you up in the river, Reverend," he said, "down below the house that burned. We were both caught in an old sewer under the house. It's a place that fills up with water sometimes. You were found three hours after I was, and in almost the same spot. Our boats kept patrolling the place, and suddenly one of them spotted you in the water."

"Unconscious?"

"Like a log. Doc says you must have bumped something with your head. Why you weren't drowned I don't know, unless you're part fish."

Daunt's mind was getting clearer. He began to remember. He nearly remembered—but not quite—why all this was so important.

"Go on. Why am I here?" he demanded.

"You're here, Reverend, because you sat up in your bed in the hospital and acted like a crazy man. Any doctor but Quimby would have had you strapped down. You made us bring you out on the river—and let me tell you something else—you made us bring bathing-trunks along, too. I'll bet you don't know any more now why you wanted trunks than I do!"

Daunt's sudden frenzy had been followed by calm. He shut his eyes.

"I shall know in a minute," he said. "Wait."

It was less than that when he opened his eyes again and smiled at his two companions.

"The mind is a wonderful mechanism," he said. "I have had a strange experience which I recall describing as a dream. But it was not entirely a dream. It was my mind's fantastic way of telling me something. That something was so important that even before I was quite myself, a part of my mind took command and insisted on these preparations—insisted on your bringing me here in this boat. It even insisted on the bathing-trunks. Tell me—have you heard from Stubbs?"

Kerns looked helplessly at him.

"Don't you remember *that*, Reverend?" he asked softly.

"I remember that you thought him dead. Possibly he is dead. How long since you and I were trapped in the sewer, Kerns?"

"About twelve hours," the Chief of Police answered hesitantly.

"My mind has been telling me some strange things. It——"

He stopped abruptly, his eyes fixed on the west bank of the river.

"You're looking the wrong way if you're trying to see the ruins of the old house, Reverend," Kerns suggested. "They're on the east bank. We're directly opposite them now."

But Daunt did not turn.

"Who is that?" he demanded.

"You mean the old Negro who's fishing?" Quimby asked.

"That's Mose Johnson, Reverend," Kerns supplied. "Quite a character along the river. You're likely to find him at that same spot on the retaining wall any hour of the day or night. Daytimes, he sits there basking in the sunshine. And he'll sit for hours under the glare of the arclight after dark. Says the fish bite pretty well then. Whatever it is you're after, I'm afraid Mose can't help you much."

"You said I was caught in a sewer,

Yet they picked me up in the river. How did I get into the river?"

Kerns answered patiently. The sudden change of subject did not astonish him. He had dealt with men who were recovering from shock.

"It hasn't been used as a sewer for a good many years, Reverend. It runs under the river. Comes up by the west bank here. There's an opening above low-water level. That's where we washed out —both of us."

"Below where the old man fishes?"

"Just below."

KERNS, his hand on the controls, had slowed the boat down and eased it toward the right bank, in response to a signal from Quimby to humor their companion. But neither he nor the doctor was prepared for Daunt's next question.

"Kerns, you know this river front rather well. Do you recall anything Egyptian about it?"

"Egyptian?"

"I mean any kind of Egyptian image —such as a hawk-headed god, for instance."

"Wait a minute." Kerns eyed the old retaining wall, thoughtfully. "I wish this darned water was a little clearer," he added.

"Why?" Quimby demanded.

"That question of the Reverend's. It's got me thinking. When I used to hang around here, the river was a lot lower than it is now. I seem to remember——"

He opened the throttle again. The boat shot to the side of the river, just below the old darky.

"Mose, you used to fish here when this wall was first built, didn't you?"

"Fished heah befo' it was built, Chief."

"Then you ought to remember what the base looks like. You must have had your eyes on it when you were fishing." Kerns pointed to the muddy stream at the base of the wall. "Down here below the water line. All that used to be clear when the wall was new. Is there any kind of a head down there, cut in the stone—a hawk or something?"

The old man flashed a white-toothed grin.

"Suah is! Used to have watah runnin' through it. A great big hawk. It's straight down theah, Chief, sah—I'm a-sittin' right ovah it this minute."

Kerns stared, round-eyed, at Daunt.

"Reverend, how in the name of all that's wonderful did you know that?"

But Daunt did not hear him. His face was alight with suppressed excitement.

"My eyes are not quite normal, Quimby," he said. "I want you to note that. No doubt they have been affected by what I went through. Even now, when I am no longer dazed by the bruise on my head, that old Negro appears like a gigantic ebony figure—like a Nubian slave. It is still early, Kerns. No one is watching us. Get into your trunks."

"Who—me?" Kerns demanded, but he got no further, for the big doctor turned on him.

"Do it," he said curtly. "I'll put on my own, too. I'm an excellent swimmer. Reverend, I'm beginning to catch your meaning. You've had some kind of fantastic mental experience. You're checking it against certain things we know to be real—that old Negro, the gargoyle under the water—and it seems to tally. Now you want us to look for something down there." He pointed to the water.

Daunt nodded. "An opening—probably at the side of the river."

Quimby was undressing rapidly. Kerns followed his example.

"Anything else you can tell us about it?"

Daunt closed his eyes. He placed both

hands over them, to shut out the sunlit world more completely.

"I am not sure," he said, "but it seems to me I must have shot out of the sewer opening and come to the surface for an instant—long enough to glimpse the old Negro and transmute him into a Nubian slave, with an elaborate dream story to explain him. Then I sank again and saw the Egyptian gargoyle."

The doctor nodded. He was pulling on his bathing-trunks.

"Go on!"

"Somewhere near the gargoyle there may be another opening. It seems a possible explanation. Kerns says I was picked up hours after he was. Perhaps I blundered into that opening, while he did not."

"We'll find out," the doctor declared, crisply. He spied a rope at the bottom of the boat. "I'll tie this around me, Chief. You remain in the boat—for the first trip, anyway. I'm a good swimmer. Hold the rope and be ready to pull me up. If we both go we may both get caught, and neither be able to help the other."

DAUNT was silent. He sat with his eyes fixed on the swirling, muddy water between the boat and the retaining wall, as if, by staring long enough, he might be able to divine what lay beneath. But the doctor wasted no time in staring. He poised himself a moment, and dove. His body disappeared. The coils of rope slipped after him. Kerns had already knotted the end to the boat.

Bubbles appeared at the surface of the water. Daunt and the Chief of Police leaned forward, watching them with intent eyes. Suddenly, Quimby's head shot up. He climbed back into the boat.

"I found your hawk," he spluttered.

"Nothing else?"

"Not yet." He looked up at the old darky, who now stood, an apparently puzzled spectator, on the top of the retaining wall. "I'm using you for a marker, Mose. Don't move a step till I tell you to. All right, boys. I'm off again."

This time, he was gone longer. Kerns stared anxiously after the rope, as it slowly paid out. He was so absorbed that he failed to notice Daunt's actions. With swift, nervous jerks, the little clergyman was throwing off his clothes. He was already in his trunks when Quimby climbed back into the boat—somewhat breathless, but enormously self-satisfied.

The first words he could get out were directed to the old fisherman.

"Did you see where I came up, Mose?"

"Yes, *sah!* Right where that bug is on de watah."

"Stand opposite the place. That's the spot I want you to mark. Reverend, you were right. There's an opening under the wall. I had a look into it. It's——" He stopped, suddenly. "Are you under the impression I'm going to let you start diving?"

Daunt's eyes flashed.

"You are going to let me do whatever I wish," he said. "What did you find?"

The doctor flushed, then slowly grinned and shrugged his shoulders.

"Why should I worry if you get pneumonia? This town has too many preachers, anyhow. What I found, Reverend, is one of the queerest things I ever set eyes on. I think we're running into something—something big. I came on this opening, and found two wooden railings going up inside, through the water—like hand-rails."

"Two—*two?*" Daunt demanded.

"That's what I said. Why?"

"Never mind. Go on."

"I followed them up. They looked like guides to lead somebody swimming in from the river. It was taking a

chance, but I figured I might be able to breathe at the top. And sure enough I was!" He grinned triumphantly at his two listeners. "I'll bet my year's income to a cigarette-lighter we've discovered some kind of criminal hangout—some place you fellows on the police force don't know exists. I found a second wall inside that opening. The wood railings guided me to the top of it. It was all cemented up to the roof except the part just above the railings. Right there, Reverend"—he tapped the clergyman on the chest—"right there, at the top of the railings, I was above the water line. I could breathe. I sat on the wall and looked down into a cave. That's all I can call it—a cave. There are steps going down on the inside from the top of the wall——"

Daunt laughed—an excited laugh, like a child's.

"*Narrow* steps?" he asked.

"Yes—how did you know? I didn't go down them. I'd gone far enough—alone. I just looked off into the place—it's rather dark, but there's a little light, rather dull and silvery—then I pulled out."

Daunt's eyes were shining. He stared into the muddy water with a curious smile on his lips.

" 'Silvery light'!" he repeated to himself. "Kerns, this is going to be one of the strangest bits of detective work ever done. Who owned the house, by the way—the house that was burned?"

"Lefronti. Didn't I tell you, Reverend? He's a half-breed Frenchman who has the dope traffic of this whole district in the hollow of his hand. I haven't been able to pin it on him—yet. But I'm going to."

"Quimby," Daunt said to the big doctor, "you're a physician. You know what strange tricks the mind sometimes plays. I'm convinced from the working of my mind that I have been in the cave you found, and that—possibly—I have seen Stubbs's body there. In my mental experience he was exceedingly pale, which I fear means only one thing. This man, Lefronti—what does he look like, Kerns?"

"Tall, thin, very dark."

"I may have seen him, too. It is your turn to stay with the boat, Quimby. Don't argue. Do as I say. Kerns and I will go below. Hail another boat, have them get a force of police here. But remain in this spot yourself. Now, Kerns"—he looked quizzically at the detective—"do you know where the cave opening is, with relation to the river bank?"

"Just to the left of old Mose, Reverend. Quimby made him stay there as a marker. Remember?"

"Very good. Ready, Kerns?"

The tall police chief peered about him, and quietly picked up something from the bottom of the boat.

"Here's an electric torch, Reverend, that'll burn under water. We use it sometimes in hunting for floaters. You're sure you don't want to wait for the squad?"

"Time may be invaluable."

"O. K. I'll dive first. Whichever of us finds the opening can make sure the other finds it, too. Are you on?"

Daunt's reply was characteristic. Coolly ignoring Kerns's proposed plan, he proceeded to perch in a diving position, with hands together.

"*I* will go first," he said—and dove.

6. *The Trap*

DAUNT knew that Kerns rather fancied himself as a swimmer; so he enjoyed the experience of beating his friend to the take-off. The little clergyman's mind had quite recovered. It had never been clearer. He remembered perfectly the weird and fantastic fabric it

had woven under the stimulus of a violent blow on the skull, and he was eager to check the reality point by point against that dream experience. And where would the reality lead him? He would find Stubbs's body. What else would he find?

He reached the base of the wall easily. With his right hand against it, he pushed himself to the left. His fingers slipped in contact with the slime-covered stones, but he got enough purchase to keep from rising.

Someone loomed suddenly in front of him. It was the chief. He must have dived more to the left. Kerns was achieving the triumph of a grin under water, which made his face look like a grotesque species of fish. He was pointing toward the opening. Daunt shot into it. Just within were the parallel railings, leading diagonally upward, as the doctor had described them. As Daunt grasped them, he felt a shove from behind—Kerns again.

In a moment, he was atop the inner wall, breathing in great gasps. Kerns was just behind him.

"There's the steps!" the Chief of Police whispered, breathlessly.

Half a dozen stone steps, narrow and worn, led down to the floor of the cave. Kerns played his torch upon them, but already Daunt's interest was beyond.

"The silvery light!" he exclaimed. "There, toward the back of the cave! What is it, Kerns?"

"Just an electric bulb, dangling from the ceiling," the chief growled. "There's a lot of white clay here. That's what makes it look silvery. We've got to watch our foot. That bulb never grew there by itself. Some guy's using this place for awfully private business."

Daunt did not reply. He was going down the steps. As he did so, he peered carefully—breathlessly—from side to side. These were the steps of his dream—if it could be called a dream. The wooden railings were the gold railings between which he and Kerns and Stubbs were to have undergone the Torture of the Touching Fingers. The silvery light, reflected from the clay of the cave, was the light of the Abyss. Even the old fisherman on the bank and the Egyptian hawk's head fitted in. They proved that he had come this way, with a mind dazed and dim, though still remembering. But where was the Abyss? And had he only imagined the presence of Stubbs?

Kerns was cautiously advancing the beam of his light farther and farther into the cave.

"There's some kind of a fault on ahead, Reverend!" he whispered.

"What do you mean?"

"I mean it looks as if the floor falls away—a crevice or something in the clay."

"That's what I want to see!"

Kerns swore under his breath. His companion was running straight ahead, with calm disregard of any possible danger.

"Reverend! For the love of Lulu!"

But Daunt stopped at the edge. It was not a very deep rift—perhaps eight feet. To the right of where they stood, it was spanned by a narrow plank, not two yards in length. The single ceiling-bulb hung just beyond this plank on the farther side, and slanted its ray dimly into the pit.

KERNS pushed up beside Daunt, and at once gave a gasp of amazement. Stubbs's face grinned wanly at them. He was standing in the pit, a short distance away.

"Stubbs!" Daunt tried to say more, but his voice failed.

"Are you all right now, sir? Have you got over it?" the man-servant inquired, anxiously.

"Tell me instantly how you came there!" his master commanded; then he faltered: "It really *is* you, Stubbs—this time?"

"In a way, sir." Stubbs approached them slowly. He walked upon the bottom of the crevice with a slight limp. "I broke my arm when I fell into here. That's why I can't get up without help. I was chasing Lefronti, and I fell in."

"Lefronti!" Kerns almost stumbled over the edge in his excitement.

"I'll tell you in ten words." Stubbs spoke wearily, but his face was as keen as usual. "This is the place where Lefronti stores his dope. It's under his house. You know he owned the house on the other side of the river, too—the one that burned?"

Kerns nodded, eagerly.

"He was trying to trap you, Mr. Kerns. You had the goods on him, and he knew it. So he told Bando—the half-wit hunchback who worked for him—to get Reverend Daunt's friend, and say the Reverend was being done to death in that house. Bando pulled a boner. He got me in mistake for you. I was driving the car home when he hailed me, and I gave it everything it had to try to save the Reverend. See?"

Kerns nodded again, slowly. Daunt was gazing about the cave, staring hard at the walls, the ceiling, and the part beyond the rift, which seemed to curve around a corner.

"We found Bando's body in the sewer," the chief said.

"That was up to Lefronti, too. The fire burned quicker than he expected. Bando was caught by an explosion just as he was trying to drop into the sewer. He dropped, all right—and I dropped after him. But somehow the fire had done for him, and I was hardly hurt at all. How about a hand? I want to get out of here."

They could see now that Stubbs had rigged a sling for his arm with the sleeve of his coat. He held up the other arm. Kerns pulled him up easily. He staggered a little as he joined them.

"Kinda used up," he apologized. "That was a wild chase I had after Lefronti. He was in the old sewer with a flashlight when he saw me. He jumped into the river with me close behind, and swam into this place. Then I fell down here and broke my arm. He was decent about it, though—gave me food and water. He couldn't very well let me go, I guess—I knew too much. But he figured he might need a hostage. He let me talk to you, sir, but it was no use."

"You hear that, Kerns?" Daunt spoke exultantly. "Then I *was* here, Stubbs?"

"You were here, sir, as crazy as a loon. You didn't have bats in your belfry—you had eagles! I figured you got in by accident, from what Lefronti said. He led you around a lot—to see whether you really were nuts or were just faking it, I guess—and you raved as I never heard anybody in my life rave before. You thought Mr. Kerns and I were both with you. Lefronti told me at last that he'd shove you out again into the water, and maybe someone would rescue you. Anyway, he was sure you'd never know you'd been in this place. He took off your shoes and coat so they wouldn't drag you down."

"My shoes? Yes, yes! Tell me, Stubbs—did he say anything to me after that?"

Stubbs smiled at his master's excitement.

"Now I come to think of it, sir, he did say something, but not to you. I heard somebody call him from back in the cave—or maybe from his house above it. He answered, 'I'm coming.' "

"No, Stubbs. What he said was, 'I come!' "

"I guess you're right, sir. He's French. That's about the way he would say it."

"His last words before he jumped into the abyss!" the clergyman exclaimed, to himself. Stubbs caught the words.

"Maybe he did jump somewhere," he said. "He didn't come back."

"I'll tell you where he jumped," Kerns volunteered. "Right into the hoosegow. We had men looking for him, and they got him in his house. But his smart lawyers will have him out on a habeas corpus; so I move we get away from this place as quick as the Lord will let us!"

Daunt nodded.

"You, Stubbs," he said, "—you can't swim with that arm. Kerns and I will have to get you to the surface between us."

For answer, Stubbs pointed with the other arm. "We weren't quick enough, sir," he said. "He must have got that habeas corpus!"

Daunt looked where Stubbs was pointing. It was the direction they had come from—the direction of the steps and the river entrance. Kerns, after one sharp look, shouted hoarsely and started running that way. He leapt up the steps and arriving at their top battered at something with his hands.

"No use!" he groaned. "It's a solid iron gate, Reverend. Comes down from above. It blocks our way out over the top of the wall. Lefronti's found out we were here—and he's worked some kind of a mechanism. *Now* what are we going to do?"

DAUNT had gone a few steps toward the wall. His face was placid. Kerns's rugged features were grim, and even the imperturbable Stubbs looked worried. But the little clergyman glanced at them and actually smiled.

"It strikes me that I must follow this mental experience of mine through to the finish," he observed. "You don't know what it was—either of you. Some day I will tell you. Just now I must ascertain whether the clue from my mind fails, or whether it will guide us to safety. Perhaps we are doomed. Perhaps not. Stubbs, did you see whether Lefronti guided me across this rift in the floor?"

"He led you right across the plank, sir. He seemed to get a big kick out of showing you everything there was and hearing you rave about it. I heard him laugh once, and say he never expected to have a circus like that with 'the great Daunt.' "

"Across the plank—and then where?"

"On into the cave, sir. I couldn't see where. You must remember I was down there in the hole."

"Kerns, my feet are of rather peculiar shape. I have to have my shoes made to order. I want you to come with me across that plank and use your light—use it to follow my footprints if you can. We shall try to learn just how much friend Lefronti showed me when he thought I was insane."

"You're on, Reverend!" the detective concurred, excitedly. "You've figured out plenty up to now. Maybe you'll get the rest of it. Coming, Stubbs?"

Stubbs merely smiled a reply, but he was just behind when they crossed the plank.

"Veer left," he directed, quietly. "I could see enough to know that's where you went, sir."

"Here's a print," Kerns cried, stooping. "Can't tell its shape, but it proves we're on the trail." But a moment later he groaned. "The clay ends here. We've struck solid rock. Couldn't be cleaner if he'd swept it."

"Rock?" Daunt tapped it with his bare foot. "I believe you're right, Kerns. I

remember rock. Wait a minute." He pressed both hands to his eyes. "Look for a part of the rock which rises above the rest, Kerns—a sort of pathway."

Kerns swept his light about. It moved steadily over the floor of the broad cave, first immediately in front of them, then at longer range.

"Lord, what a cave! This must be something like that one down in Kentucky. I don't blame Lefronti for not wanting us to get out and give it away. A raised path you said, Reverend? Here's a kind of narrow ridge a couple of feet high, but it isn't straight at all. It seems to keep curving off to the left."

"It curves?" Daunt snatched the light, and brought his face so close to the cave floor that he was bent nearly double.

Stubbs walked beside him, his sharp eyes following every move his master made and anticipating the direction of the ridge. Suddenly, the man-servant reached up and snapped on another hanging electric bulb.

"That better, sir? I guess Lefronti turned it off after he took you through. Funny what a silver light it throws. Must be the clay walls."

"Be very careful, Stubbs. You, too, Kerns. I remember dimly a terrible danger—something connected with this ridge. But beyond the ridge——"

"Stubbs — look!" Kerns interrupted. "Isn't that a tunnel to the left?"

"Looks like one," Stubbs confirmed.

"That's the way to the house on this side of the river. There'd be a way. Of course there would. Reverend!" Suddenly Kerns's heavy hand descended in a resounding slap on his friend's plump back. "You're the eighth wonder of the world! Policemen aren't supposed to have minds. All we've got is guns and guts. But you've solved this case just with your mind! Now if we could only find the dope supply!" He stopped. His light swung off to the right. "There it is! See that pile of boxes over there? See it, Stubbs? Is that Lefronti's dope supply, or am I crazy?"

A voice answered, coldly, precisely, and with a grimly humorous intonation.

"Quite right, Mr. Kerns! You are not crazy. You are dead!"

The revolver barked, as Lefronti stepped out of the darkness of the tunnel.

But Stubbs had flung himself forward. It was a breathless flying tackle, which ended as he caught Lefronti's legs with his one good arm.

Yet it was not quite the end. The Frenchman fell sidewise. One instant the sheen of his revolver glistened in the dim light. The next there was a high-pitched, hopeless scream: afterward, far below, a crash.

"Quick, Mr. Kerns — your light!" Stubbs shouted from where he lay.

But already Kerns was directing the luminous shaft down the broad well to the right of the tunnel. It carried easily to the bottom.

"Must be thirty feet down there," the police chief said. His voice shook a little. "No use, I guess. He landed on his head. We'll have to get a block and tackle." He pointed the light forward. "This isn't a long tunnel. I see daylight at the end. We're O.K., boys!"

"Stubbs!" Daunt was helping the fallen man-servant to his feet. "Are you hurt, Stubbs?"

Kerns turned the light that way, and Stubbs was seen to smile—rather wanly.

"Just a lead pill, sir," he said, earnestly. "It might have took me in my good arm, but it didn't. The wing it landed in was out of business anyway. Better be lucky than rich—eh, sir?"

"'Twas said, the Sieur had more than once been spy'd alone at midnight by the river's side."

Psychopompos

By H. P. LOVECRAFT

A tale in rime

I AM He who howls in the night;
  I am He who moans in the snow;
I am He who hath never seen light;
  I am He who mounts from below.

My car is the car of Death;
  My wings are the wings of dread;
My breath is the north wind's breath;
  My prey are the cold and the dead.

In old Auvergne, when schools were poor and few,
And peasants fancy'd what they scarcely knew,
When lords and gentry shunn'd their Monarch's throne
For solitary castles of their own,
There dwelt a man of rank, whose fortress stood
In the hush'd twilight of a hoary wood.
De Blois his name; his lineage high and vast,
A proud memorial of an honor'd past;
But curious swains would whisper now and then
That Sieur De Blois was not as other men.
In person dark and lean, with glossy hair,
And gleaming teeth that he would often bare,
With piercing eye, and stealthy roving glance,
And tongue that clipt the soft, sweet speech of France;
The Sieur was little lov'd and seldom seen,
So close he kept within his own demesne.
The castle servants, few, discreet, and old,
Full many a tale of strangeness might have told;
But bow'd with years, they rarely left the door
Wherein their sires and grandsires serv'd before.
Thus gossip rose, as gossip rises best,
When mystery imparts a keener zest;
Seclusion oft the poison tongue attracts,
And scandal prospers on a dearth of facts.
'Twas said, the Sieur had more than once been spy'd
Alone at midnight by the river's side,
With aspect so uncouth, and gaze so strange,
That rustics cross'd themselves to see the change;
Yet none, when press'd, could clearly say or know
Just what it was, or why they trembled so.
De Blois, as rumor whisper'd, fear'd to pray,
Nor us'd his chapel on the Sabbath day;
Howe'er this may have been, 'twas known at least
His household had no chaplain, monk, or priest.
But if the Master liv'd in dubious fame,
Twice fear'd and hated was his noble Dame;
As dark as he, in features wild and proud,
And with a weird supernal grace endow'd,
The haughty mistress scorn'd the rural train
Who sought to learn her source, but sought in vain.
Old women call'd her eyes too bright by half,
And nervous children shiver'd at her laugh;
Richard, the dwarf (whose word had little weight),
Vow'd she was like a serpent in her gait,
Whilst ancient Pierre (the aged often err)
Laid all her husband's mystery to her.
Still more absurd were those odd mutter'd things

That calumny to curious list'ners brings;
Those subtle slanders, told with downcast face,
And muffled voice . . . those tales no man may trace;
Tales that the faith of old wives can command,
Though always heard at sixth or seventh hand.
Thus village legend darkly would imply
That Dame De Blois possess'd an evil eye;
Or going further, furtively suggest
A lurking spark of sorcery in her breast;
Old Mère Allard (herself half witch) once said
The lady's glance work'd strangely on the dead.
So liv'd the pair, like many another two
That shun the crowd, and shrink from public view.
They scorn'd the doubts by ev'ry peasant shown,
And ask'd but one thing . . . to be let alone!

'Twas Candlemass, the dreariest time of year,
With fall long gone, and spring too far to cheer,
When little Jean, the bailiff's son and heir,
Fell sick and threw the doctors in despair.
A child so stout and strong that few would think
An hour might carry him to death's dark brink,
Yet pale he lay, though hidden was the cause,
And Galens search'd in vain through Nature's laws.
But stricken sadness could not quite suppress
The roving thought, or wrinkled grandam's guess:
Though spoke by stealth, 'twas known to half a score
That Dame De Blois rode by the day before;
She had (they said) with glances weird and wild
Paus'd by the gate to view the prattling child,
Nor did they like the smile which seem'd to trace
New lines of evil on her proud, dark face.
These things they whisper'd, when the mother's cry
Told of the end . . . the gentle soul gone by;
In genuine grief the kindly watcher wept,
Whilst the lov'd babe with saints and angels slept.
The village priest his simple rites went through,
And good Michel nail'd up the box of yew;
Around the corpse the holy candles burn'd,
The mourners sigh'd, the parents dumbly yearn'd.
Then one by one each sought his humble bed,
And left the lonely mother with her dead.
Late in the night it was, when o'er the vale
The storm king swept with pandemoniac gale;
Deep pil'd the cruel snow, yet strange to tell,
The lightning sputter'd while the white flakes fell;
A hideous presence seem'd abroad to steal,

And terror sounded in the thunder's peal.
Within the house of grief the tapers glow'd
Whilst the poor mother bow'd beneath her load;
Her salty eyes too tired now to weep,
Too pain'd to see, too sad to close in sleep.
The clock struck three, above the tempest heard,
When something near the lifeless infant stirr'd;
Some slipp'ry thing, that flopp'd in awkward way,
And climb'd the table where the coffin lay,
With scaly convolutions strove to find
The cold, still clay that death had left behind.
The nodding mother hears . . . starts broad awake . . .
Empower'd to reason, yet too stunn'd to shake;
The pois'nous thing she sees, and nimbly foils
The ghoulish purpose of the quiv'ring coils:
With ready ax the serpent's head she cleaves,
And thrills with savage triumph whilst she grieves.
The injur'd reptile hissing glides from sight,
And hides its cloven carcass in the night.

The weeks slipp'd by, and gossip's tongue began
To call the Sieur De Blois an alter'd man;
With curious mien he oft would pace along
The village street, and eye the gaping throng.
Yet whilst he showed himself as ne'er before,
His wild-eyed lady was observ'd no more.
In course of time, 'twas scarce thought odd or ill
That he his ears with village lore should fill;
Nor was the town with special rumor rife
When he sought out the bailiff and his wife:
Their tale of sorrow, with its ghastly end,
Was told, indeed, by ev'ry wond'ring friend.
The Sieur heard all, and low'ring rode away,
Nor was he seen again for many a day.

When vernal sunshine shed its cheering glow,
And genial zephyrs blew away the snow,
To frighten'd swains a horror was reveal'd
In the damp herbage of a melting field.
There (half preserved by winter's frigid bed)
Lay the dark Dame De Blois, untimely dead;
By some assassin's stroke most foully slain,
Her shapely brow and temples cleft in twain.
Reluctant hands the dismal burden bore
To the stone arches of the husband's door,
Where silent serfs the ghastly thing receiv'd,
Trembling with fright, but less amaz'd than griev'd;

The Sieur his dame beheld with blazing eyes,
And shook with anger, more than with surprize.
(At least 'tis thus the stupid peasants told
Their wide-mouth'd wives when they the tale unroll'd.)
The village wonder'd why De Blois had kept
His spouse's loss unmention'd and unwept,
Nor were there lacking sland'rous tongues to claim
That the dark master was himself to blame.
But village talk could scarcely hope to solve
A crime so deep, and thus the months revolve:
The rural train repeat the gruesome tale,
And gape and marvel more than they bewail.

Swift flew the sun, and winter once again
With icy talons gripp'd the frigid plain.
December brought its store of Christmas cheer,
And grateful peasants hail'd the op'ning year;
But by the hearth as Candlemass drew nigh,
The whisp'ring ancients spoke of things gone by.
Few had forgot the dark demoniac lore
Of things that came the Candlemass before,
And many a crone intently ey'd the house
Where dwelt the sadden'd bailiff and his spouse.
At last the day arriv'd, the sky o'erspread
With dark'ning messengers and clouds of lead;
Each neighb'ring grove Æolian warnings sigh'd,
And thick'ning terrors broadcast seem'd to bide.
The good folk, though they knew not why, would run
Swift past the bailiff's door, the scene to shun;
Within the house the grieving couple wept,
And mourn'd the child who now for ever slept.
On rush'd the dusk in doubly hideous form,
Borne on the pinions of the gath'ring storm;
Unusual murmurs fill'd the rainless wind,
And hast'ning travelers fear'd to glance behind.
Mad o'er the hills the demon tempest tore;
The rising river lash'd the troubled shore;
Black through the night the awful storm god prowl'd,
And froze the list'ners' life-blood as he howl'd;
Gigantic trees like supple rushes sway'd,
Whilst for his home the trembling cotter pray'd.
Now falls a sudden lull amidst the gale;
With less'ning force the circling currents wail;
Far down the stream that laves the neighb'ring mead
Bursts a new ululation, wildly key'd;
The peasant train a frantic mien assume,
And huddle closer in the spectral gloom:

To each strain'd ear the truth too well is known,
For that dread sound can come from wolves alone!
The rustics close attend, when ere they think,
A lupine army swarms the river's brink;
From out the waters leap a howling train
That rend the air, and scatter o'er the plain:
With flaming orbs the frothing creatures fly,
And chant with hellish voice their hungry cry.
First of the pack a mighty monster leaps
With fearless tread, and martial order keeps;
Th' attendant wolves his yelping tones obey,
And form in columns for the coming fray:
No frighten'd swain they harm, but silent bound
With a fix'd purpose o'er the frozen ground.
Straight course the monsters through the village street,
Unholy vigor in their flying feet;
Through half-shut blinds the shelter'd peasants peer,
And wax in wonder as they lose in fear.
Th' excited pack at last their goal perceive,
And the vex'd air with deaf'ning clamor cleave;
The churls, astonish'd, watch th' unnatural herd
Flock round a cottage at the leader's word:
Quick spreads the fearsome fact, by rumor blown,
That the doom'd cottage is the bailiff's own!
Round and around the howling demons glide,
Whilst the fierce leader scales the vine-clad side;
The frantic wind its horrid wail renews,
And mutters madly through the leafless yews.
In the frail house the bailiff calmly waits
The rav'ning horde, and trusts th' impartial Fates,
But the wan wife revives with curious mien
Another monster and an older scene;
Amidst th' increasing wind that rocks the walls,
The dame to him the serpent's deed recalls:
Then as a nameless thought fills both their minds,
The bare-fang'd leader crashes through the blinds.
Across the room, with murd'rous fury rife,
Leaps the mad wolf, and seizes on the wife;
With strange intent he drags his shrieking prey,
Close to the spot where once the coffin lay.
Wilder and wilder roars the mounting gale
That sweeps the hills and hurtles through the vale;
The ill-made cottage shakes, the pack without
Dance with new fury in demoniac rout.
Quick as his thought, the valiant bailiff stands
Above the wolf, a weapon in his hands;
The ready ax that served a year before,

Now serves as well to slay one monster more.
The creature drops inert, with shatter'd head,
Full on the floor, and silent as the dead;
The rescu'd wife recalls the dire alarms,
And faints from terror in her husband's arms.
But as he holds her, all the cottage quakes,
And with full force the titan tempest breaks:
Down crash the walls, and o'er their shrinking forms
Burst the mad revels of the storm of storms.
Th' encircling wolves advance with ghastly pace,
Hunger and murder in each gleaming face,
But as they close, from out the hideous night
Flashes a bolt of unexpected light:
The vivid scene to ev'ry eye appears,
And peasants shiver with returning fears.
Above the wreck the scatheless chimney stays,
Its outline glimm'ring in the fitful rays,
Whilst o'er the hearth still hangs the household shrine,
The Savior's image and the Cross divine!
Round the blest spot a lambent radiance glows,
And shields the cotters from their stealthy foes:
Each monstrous creature marks the wondrous glare,
Droops, fades, and vanishes in empty air!
The village train with startled eyes adore,
And count their beads in rev'rence o'er and o'er.
Now fades the light, and dies the raging blast,
The hour of dread and reign of horror past.
Pallid and bruis'd, from out his toppled walls
The panting bailiff with his good wife crawls:
Kind hands attend them, whilst o'er all the town
A strange sweet peace of spirit settles down.
Wonder and fear are still'd in soothing sleep,
As through the breaking clouds the moon rays peep.

Here paus'd the prattling grandam in her speech,
Confus'd with age, the tale half out of reach;
The list'ning guest, impatient for a clue,
Fears 'tis not one tale, but a blend of two;
He fain would know how far'd the widow'd lord
Whose eery ways th' initial theme afford,
And marvels that the crone so quick should slight
His fate, to babble of the wolf-rack'd night.
The old wife, press'd, for greater clearness strives,
Nods wisely, and her scatter'd wits revives;
Yet strangely lingers on her latter tale
Of wolf and bailiff, miracle and gale.
When (quoth the crone) the dawn's bright radiance bath'd

Th' eventful scene, so late in terror swath'd,
The chatt'ring churls that sought the ruin'd cot
Found a new marvel in the gruesome spot.
From fallen walls a trail of gory red,
As of the stricken wolf, erratic led;
O'er road and mead the new-dript crimson wound,
Till lost amidst the neighb'ring swampy ground:
With wonder unappeas'd the peasants burn'd,
For what the quicksand takes is ne'er return'd.

Once more the grandam, with a knowing eye,
Stops in her tale, to watch a hawk soar by;
The weary list'ner, baffled, seeks anew
For some plain statement, or enlight'ning clue.
Th' indulgent crone attends the puzzled plea,
Yet strangely mutters o'er the mystery.
The Sieur? Ah, yes . . . that morning all in vain
His shaking servants scour'd the frozen plain;
No man had seen him since he rode away
In silence on the dark preceding day.
His horse, wild-eyed with some unusual fright,
Came wand'ring from the river bank that night.
His hunting-hound, that mourn'd with piteous woe,
Howl'd by the quicksand swamp, his grief to show.
The village folk thought much, but utter'd less;
The servants' search wore out in emptiness:
For Sieur De Blois (the old wife's tale is o'er)
Was lost to mortal sight for evermore.

Malay Love Magic*

By PAUL MORAND

I HEARD Nels Nielsen's life history from Hugo Van Brok, Inspector General of the Dutch Colonial Council, one evening as we sat together on the long porch of the Grand Hotel in Penang, Straits Settlement, dangling our legs over the long arms of the white rateen armchairs to catch every faintest breath of air, tasting to the full the blackish hour of relative coolness and peace which elapses between the setting of the murderous sun and the arrival of those hellish little assassins, the mosquitoes.

Before the darkness fell, an eccentric amateur had shown us a beautiful collec-

*Adapted by Roy Temple House from the French.

tion of "creeses," those fantastic serpentine Malay daggers, often beautifully ornamented, about whose mysterious deadliness so many gruesome stories are afloat. Their owner swore that every beautiful sinuous-lined weapon in his lot had been treated with a subtle substance which, if slipped under your skin and into your circulation in even the smallest quantity, would fell you to the earth like a thunderbolt and leave you as dead as if a bullet had crashed into your heart. And he had offered to prove his contention on the person of any doubter. There had been an instantaneous reflex of backing away from him, a period of half-hearted chaffing, and a constraint that was slow in wearing away and letting the conversation go on freely again. After that, the group had fallen to recalling instances of the ugly malice and devilish cleverness of these dark fellows who look and talk and walk much like Europeans, but who are nevertheless eternally and dangerously different.

Hugo Van Brok's position amounted to a kind of traveling superior judgeship in the Dutch East Indies. The archipelago's superior court sits in Batavia, the capital of Java, but the natives, the Arabs, Chinese, Tamils, and in general the non-Christian Asiatics, are amenable to local tribunals which render their decisions according to their local common law, under the general surveillance of a Netherlands functionary. In this supervisory capacity, Van Brok was constantly traveling all over the Indies, Sumatra, Java, Borneo, and the smaller islands. He knew the native customs and a great deal about the native mentality in all this quarter of the globe, and he knew the European colonists whose contacts with the natives with mentalities so completely different from their own, gave rise to so many puzzling problems. His memory was stored with dozens of uncanny case histories. And among others, he told us the creepy story of Nels Nielsen.

"Nielsen," he said, "was a gentle blond giant from Copenhagen, honest, simple, generous, and completely lacking in the imagination to conceive that any other human being on the globe, white, yellow or brown, could be anything else than transparently honest, simple and generous. He was in the employ of a rubber company, and he had gone down into the hill region of southern Sumatra, into the Atjeh country, where he had a lifetime of work cut out for him. The work and the surroundings must have pleased him, for when his company offered to transfer him to a less solitary and god-forsaken territory, he refused them flat without even stopping to hear the terms of their offer. I heard about him, and I suppose most of the more alert and enterprising Europeans in the islands had heard about him too. It is curious how we few hundreds or thousands of Occidentals, scattered over these millions of square miles and among these swarms of incarnated spooky spirits that we call Malays, Hindoos and Chinese, hold together and keep a sort of sympathetic and apprehensive touch with each other. I had heard of Nels Nielsen's case, and I had wondered about him.

"Then, two years ago or so, I had to go down into the Atjeh country myself. I found out what was the matter. Nielsen was living with an Atjeh woman. Not just a random physiological affair, either. These brown women are often attracted by the big fair white men from the West, and when they set out to ensnare one of them, they are pretty sure to do a good job of it. Don't ask me how they do it. Western women turn men's heads sometimes and make monkeys or slaves of them, but these Orientals have tricks that make the Mata-Haris and the Cleopatras look like pikers. It's more like a snake

with a toad. There's a science to it, and I've seen ugly, slatternly island women without a grain of what you call 'sex appeal,' driving European men around at their own sweet will, exactly as a little black chimpanzee of a Hindoo sits on the head of a great, strong elephant and does just what he pleases with him. It's black art, I tell you."

Van Brok brooded sadly for a while.

"And it isn't simply that these Orientals have some ghastly secret power that the West doesn't understand the first thing about," he mused. "It's partly because men—all men, but especially European men—are weak, indolent and cowardly. Do you know that there are certain isolated groups in the islands where the government is in the hands of the women? Matriarchies, they are, where the generally down-trodden Oriental woman runs everything, while lazy, spineless males are shut up in harems and fattened, reserved for the amusement of the women in their periods of leisure, and for the reproduction of the species.

"And when a European yields to the fatal charm of native ways, it isn't long till he isn't a man any longer at all. I've known a lot of them that quit taking leaves to go home to Europe, that let the whirlpool suck them in completely. I know their history the minute I set eyes on them. There is a physical change—you wouldn't believe how much of one, if you didn't see it with your own eyes. Their skin gets different, generally a kind of iodine color, their eyes begin to slant a little, their nose thickens. They pay no attention to the swarm of half-breed children that they are responsible for. They get sleepy and indifferent, and they aren't of any use in the world any longer. 'Gone native' is the contemptuous phrase the English apply to them. They lose the red corpuscles out of their blood, they get as weak physically as they are morally, they shrivel up into the merest ghosts of their old selves, and they rarely live to be old.

"But I started to tell you about this Nielsen giant and his Atjeh woman. The woman was a vampire who had sucked all the will out of his soul into hers. She was a good-looker, I must say that for her. She had great brown eyes—very expressive eyes, they were. She had regular, Indian features, and she wore two big corkscrew curls at the sides of her face, like the ones our great-grandmothers used to wear in Europe. She was tall and strong, and her majestic gait was eloquent of self-confidence. She almost never left the two of us alone together. She would crouch down on the floor in front of us in the evening and listen, as we sat with our legs wrapped in bags on account of the damned mosquitoes and talked about Europe. When she was invited, she would pound out an interminable litany on an Indian drum, keeping time to it with eery movements of her handsome, idol-looking head, movements that flapped back and forth the enormous soebangs, the heavy silver ear-rings that had pulled the lobes of her ears all out of shape.

"The Atjehs, as you may know, are a byword all over the archipelago for their cruelty and vindictiveness. Their vendettas never die, and they are constantly decimated by their bloody local quarrels. They have submitted with ill grace to European control, and no Occidental is safe among them. They hate the barking speech of the West European peoples, who, according to one of their proverbs, are the product of a union between a woman and a dog.

"Surrounded by the rubber trees with their aerial roots reaching out like vicious sea-monsters avid for blood, the Dane and I looked down at the village below,

a colony of camphor and rubber gatherers. Nielsen told me what a placid, care-free life he was leading. I could see that he was degenerating, and I scented danger in the air. I urged him to change his location, to go back to Europe at least for a while.

" 'You will pay for this pretty soon!' I warned him. 'Five years in this poisonous climate, without a single vacation in a higher country or the temperate zone! Man, if you don't do something, you won't stand it ten years!'

" 'It isn't as bad as you think,' he said quietly. 'The noisy, feverish West was wearing me out a great deal faster than this pleasant life here is doing. It is an entirely mistaken idea that no Nordic can thrive in this country. Some of us can, and we are proving it. No, it isn't that that woman means anything particular to me. I took her in because she is pleasant to look at, and because I didn't like to think of the way a Malay or Chinese trader would abuse her. She's a gentle nature, a weak, helpless nature! I may find it necessary to get rid of her one of these times. But I'm not ready to give her up now, not just now. I hate awfully bad to make the poor thing cry. And then I think I'd find it hard to go away and leave this dirty little settlement, that funny pigeon-house sticking up there with the bones of the chiefs in it, the sound of rice grinding in mortars in the morning, the "glug-glug" of the fresh water dripping out of the bamboo tubes, the monotonous melody of the Koran chanted in the night. And I am sure that I am physically better in this country than I should be anywhere else. I am going to tell you something—something that I hadn't expected to tell you. But I think it will prove that what I have just been saying is a fact.

" 'It isn't quite true that I haven't been away from this place in five years. Once, more than a year ago it is now, I *did* get a leave and started back to Europe. I had an old sweetheart in Copenhagen, and I had decided to go back and marry her. I told this woman here that I had made up my mind to surrender my rights over her by sending to her parents, as the custom is here, a stick of charred, half-burned wood.

" 'She didn't make any particular protest, and I went away without any sort of scene. But I had scarcely got aboard the steamer for Europe, when I began to feel sick. It was clear that I had lost the habit of living as the Europeans do, and I couldn't get used to it again. The only thing that seemed to get me to feeling at all right was liquor. I drank liquor by the gallon. While we were in Ceylon, I had a dizzy spell. I fell, and hurt myself rather badly. Then, farther on, I got to vomiting. I had a high fever. I felt it in my bones that I should never get to Denmark alive. Something seemed to be calling me back here, back to the pleasant life in my Malay village. I stopped off in Egypt and had a thorough medical examination. The doctors seemed to be completely nonplussed. They agreed that I was in very bad shape, but they weren't able to find out what the trouble was. They thought if I went to the mountains, if I made for Switzerland as fast as I could get there, I might get better.

" 'I didn't take their advice. I was getting surer every minute that there was just one place for me to go if I wanted to get my health back. More dead than alive, I crawled on the next boat that was bound for the East Indies. I began to get better the minute I was on the water again and bound toward the East. The minute I crossed the threshold of this palm-thatched hut, I was perfectly well again. It was a miracle, I tell you! What all the doctors in Egypt couldn't

do, this humble life here with the natives did almost instantaneously.

" 'I had already had word from my woman, in Singapore. I found a message there from her, at general delivery. It was a package with a lock of her hair and a bone. That meant, in the beautiful symbolic language of these simple people, that she had remained faithful to me and was ready to come back to me. When I reached here, I found her waiting for me, turning round and round this hut as the buffalo turns round and round the sugar-press! Beautiful, isn't it?'

"I didn't try any longer to dissuade him. I had an idea that if I talked to him too frankly, I should accomplish nothing but getting myself into trouble, for among the Malays the walls have ears and vengeance has long arms. It was clear that it wasn't in my power to help him. So, reluctantly, I said good-bye.

"A FEW months later, I heard from him again. I was down in Java, in Batavia, and a representative of the firm which employed Nielsen told me that he had been transferred to Madagascar.

"I expressed my surprize that he had agreed to the transfer.

" 'I think,' said his colleague cautiously, 'that he had some sort of difficulty with the Atjeh natives that he lived among, and that he applied for the transfer himself. I shouldn't be surprized if he came back soon. He was looking terribly pale and discouraged when he started out from here for Madagascar.'

"He never did come back. He was a wreck when he reached Tanarariva, and he lived only a short time.

"I asked the distinguished British military surgeon, Sir Eroll Dennys, what he thought about Nielsen's case, a little later when I met him here in Penang.

" 'Not the slightest doubt about it!' said Sir Eroll. 'The women of the Atjeh country have a very clever institution. If you have a turn for the jocose, you might call it 'death insurance.' When one of them catches a man and wants to hold his affections, she puts some sort of subtle poison into the herbs she cooks with his curry. The poison acts very slowly, and by periodically administering a counter-poison she can keep the poison from declaring itself. The man may go on for years and never suspect that anything is wrong, as long as he stays with the woman. But if he takes a notion to go off gallivanting about the country, as your friend did a couple of times and once too often, then—then, without his counter-poison, he's done for. Not the slightest doubt about it!' "

Van Brok was pensive again.

"That's what Sir Eroll Dennys told me," he repeated. "The British are inclined to be matter-of-fact and confident. If you asked *me*—well, as I said a while ago, I'm convinced there is such a thing as black art. Down here in the archipelago somewhere is where the Devil has his central headquarters!"

School for the Unspeakable

By MANLY WADE WELLMAN

Into what frightful horror did young Setwick blunder that night?

BART SETWICK dropped off the train at Carrington and stood for a moment on the station platform, an honest-faced, well-knit lad in tweeds. This little town and its famous school would be his home for the next eight months; but which way to the school? The sun had set, and he could barely see the shop signs across Carrington's modest main street. He hesitated, and a soft voice spoke at his very elbow:

"Are you for the school?"

Startled, Bart Setwick wheeled. In the gray twilight stood another youth, smiling thinly and waiting as if for an answer. The stranger was all of nineteen years old—that meant maturity to young Setwick, who was fifteen—and his pale face had shrewd lines to it. His tall, shambling body was clad in high-necked jersey and unfashionably tight trousers. Bart Setwick skimmed him with the quick, appraising eye of young America.

"I just got here," he replied. "My name's Setwick."

"Mine's Hoag." Out came a slender hand. Setwick took it and found it froggy-cold, with a suggestion of steel-wire muscles. "Glad to meet you. I came down on the chance someone would drop off the train. Let me give you a lift to the school."

Hoag turned away, felinely light for all his ungainliness, and led his new acquaintance around the corner of the little wooden railway station. Behind the structure, half hidden in its shadow, stood a shabby buggy with a lean bay horse in the shafts.

"Get in," invited Hoag, but Bart Setwick paused for a moment. His generation was not used to such vehicles. Hoag chuckled and said, "Oh, this is only a school wrinkle. We run to funny customs. Get in."

Setwick obeyed. "How about my trunk?"

"Leave it." The taller youth swung himself in beside Setwick and took the reins. "You'll not need it tonight."

He snapped his tongue and the bay horse stirred, drew them around and off down a bush-lined side road. Its hoofbeats were oddly muffled.

They turned a corner, another, and came into open country. The lights of Carrington, newly kindled against the night, hung behind like a constellation settled down to Earth. Setwick felt a hint of chill that did not seem to fit the September evening.

"How far is the school from town?" he asked.

"Four or five miles," Hoag replied in his hushed voice. "That was deliberate on the part of the founders—they wanted to make it hard for the students to get to town for larks. It forced us to dig up our own amusements." The pale face creased in a faint smile, as if this were a pleasantry. "There's just a few of the right sort on hand tonight. By the way, what did you get sent out for?"

Setwick frowned his mystification.

"Why, to go to school. Dad sent me."

"But what for? Don't you know that this is a high-class prison prep? Half of us are lunkheads that need poking along, the other half are fellows who got in scandals somewhere else. Like me." Again Hoag smiled.

Setwick began to dislike his companion. They rolled a mile or so in silence before Hoag again asked a question:

"Do you go to church, Setwick?"

The new boy was afraid to appear priggish, and made a careless show with, "Not very often."

"Can you recite anything from the Bible?" Hoag's soft voice took on an anxious tinge.

"Not that I know of."

"Good," was the almost hearty response. "As I was saying, there's only a few of us at the school tonight—only three, to be exact. And we don't like Bible-quoters."

Setwick laughed, trying to appear sage and cynical. "Isn't Satan reputed to quote the Bible to his own——"

"What do you know about Satan?" interrupted Hoag. He turned full on Setwick, studying him with intent, dark eyes. Then, as if answering his own question: "Little enough, I'll bet. Would you like to know about him?"

"Sure I would," replied Setwick, wondering what the joke would be.

"I'll teach you after a while," Hoag promised cryptically, and silence fell again.

HALF a moon was well up as they came in sight of a dark jumble of buildings.

"Here we are," announced Hoag, and then, throwing back his head, he emitted a wild, wordless howl that made Setwick almost jump out of the buggy. "That's to let the others know we're coming," he explained. "Listen!"

Back came a seeming echo of the howl, shrill, faint and eery. The horse wavered in its muffled trot, and Hoag clucked it back into step. They turned in at a driveway well grown up in weeds, and two minutes more brought them up to the rear of the closest building. It was dim gray in the wash of moonbeams, with blank inky rectangles for windows. Nowhere was there a light, but as the buggy came to a halt Setwick saw a young head pop out of a window on the lower floor.

"Here already, Hoag?" came a high, reedy voice.

"Yes," answered the youth at the reins, "and I've brought a new man with me."

Thrilling a bit to hear himself called a man, Setwick alighted.

"His name's Setwick," went on Hoag. "Meet Andoff, Setwick. A great friend of mine."

Andoff flourished a hand in greeting and scrambled out over the window-sill. He was chubby and squat and even paler than Hoag, with a low forehead beneath lank, wet-looking hair, and black eyes set wide apart in a fat, stupid-looking face. His shabby jacket was too tight for him, and beneath worn knickers his legs and feet were bare. He might have been an overgrown thirteen or an undeveloped eighteen.

"Felcher ought to be along in half a second," he volunteered.

"Entertain Setwick while I put up the buggy," Hoag directed him.

Andoff nodded, and Hoag gathered the lines in his hands, but paused for a final word.

"No funny business yet, Andoff," he cautioned seriously. "Setwick, don't let this lard-bladder rag you or tell you wild stories until I come back."

Andoff laughed shrilly. "No, no wild

stories," he promised. "You'll do the talking, Hoag."

The buggy trundled away, and Andoff swung his fat, grinning face to the new arrival.

"Here comes Felcher," he announced. "Felcher, meet Setwick."

Another boy had bobbed up, it seemed, from nowhere. Setwick had not seen him come around the corner of the building, or slip out of a door or window. He was probably as old as Hoag, or older, but so small as to be almost a dwarf, and frail to boot. His most notable characteristic was his hairiness. A great mop covered his head, bushed over his neck and ears, and hung unkemptly to his bright, deep-set eyes. His lips and cheeks were spread with a rank down, and a curly thatch peeped through the unbuttoned collar of his soiled white shirt. The hand he offered Setwick was almost simian in its shagginess and in the hardness of its palm. Too, it was cold and damp. Setwick remembered the same thing of Hoag's handclasp.

"We're the only ones here so far," Felcher remarked. His voice, surprizingly deep and strong for so small a creature, rang like a great bell.

"Isn't even the head-master here?" inquired Setwick, and at that the other two began to laugh uproariously, Andoff's fife-squeal rendering an obbligato to Felcher's bell-boom. Hoag, returning, asked what the fun was.

"Setwick asks," groaned Felcher, "why the head-master isn't here to welcome him."

More fife-laughter and bell-laughter.

"I doubt if Setwick would think the answer was funny," Hoag commented, and then chuckled softly himself.

Setwick, who had been well brought up, began to grow nettled.

"Tell me about it," he urged, in what he hoped was a bleak tone, "and I'll join your chorus of mirth."

Felcher and Andoff gazed at him with eyes strangely eager and yearning. Then they faced Hoag.

"Let's tell him," they both said at once, but Hoag shook his head.

"Not yet. One thing at a time. Let's have the song first."

They began to sing. The first verse of their offering was obscene, with no pretense of humor to redeem it. Setwick had never been squeamish, but he found himself definitely repelled. The second verse seemed less objectionable, but it hardly made sense:

All they tried to teach here
Now goes untaught.
Ready, steady, each here,
Knowledge we sought.
What they called disaster
Killed us not, O master!
Rule us, we beseech here,
Eye, hand and thought.

It was something like a hymn, Setwick decided; but before what altar would such hymns be sung? Hoag must have read that question in his mind.

"You mentioned Satan in the buggy on the way out," he recalled, his knowing face hanging like a mask in the half-dimness close to Setwick. "Well, that was a Satanist song."

"It was? Who made it?"

"I did," Hoag informed him. "How do you like it?"

Setwick made no answer. He tried to sense mockery in Hoag's voice, but could not find it. "What," he asked finally, "does all this Satanist singing have to do with the head-master?"

"A lot," came back Felcher deeply, and "A lot," squealed Andoff.

Hoag gazed from one of his friends to the others, and for the first time he smiled broadly. It gave him a toothy look.

"I believe," he ventured quietly but

weightily, "that we might as well let Setwick in on the secret of our little circle."

HERE it would begin, the new boy decided—the school hazing of which he had heard and read so much. He had anticipated such things with something of excitement, even eagerness, but now he wanted none of them. He did not like his three companions, and he did not like the way they approached whatever it was they intended to do. He moved backward a pace or two, as if to retreat.

Swift as darting birds, Hoag and Andoff closed in at either elbow. Their chill hands clutched him and suddenly he felt light-headed and sick. Things that had been clear in the moonlight went hazy and distorted.

"Come on and sit down, Setwick," invited Hoag, as though from a great distance. His voice did not grow loud or harsh, but it embodied real menace. "Sit on that window-sill. Or would you like us to carry you?"

At the moment Setwick wanted only to be free of their touch, and so he walked unresistingly to the sill and scrambled up on it. Behind him was the blackness of an unknown chamber, and at his knees gathered the three who seemed so eager to tell him their private joke.

"The head-master was a proper churchgoer," began Hoag, as though he were the spokesman for the group. "He didn't have any use for devils or devil-worship. Went on record against them when he addressed us in chapel. That was what started us."

"Right," nodded Andoff, turning up his fat, larval face. "Anything he outlawed, we wanted to do. Isn't that logic?"

"Logic and reason," wound up Felcher. His hairy right hand twiddled on the sill near Setwick's thigh. In the moonlight it looked like a big, nervous spider.

Hoag resumed. "I don't know of any prohibition of his it was easier or more fun to break."

Setwick found that his mouth had gone dry. His tongue could barely moisten his lips. "You mean," he said, "that you began to worship devils?"

Hoag nodded happily, like a teacher at an apt pupil. "One vacation I got a book on the cult. The three of us studied it, then began ceremonies. We learned the charms and spells, forward and backward——"

"They're twice as good backward," put in Felcher, and Andoff giggled.

"Have you any idea, Setwick," Hoag almost cooed, "what it was that appeared in our study the first time we burned wine and sulfur, with the proper words spoken over them?"

Setwick did not want to know. He clenched his teeth. "If you're trying to scare me," he managed to growl out, "it certainly isn't going to work."

All three laughed once more, and began to chatter out their protestations of good faith.

"I swear that we're telling the truth, Setwick," Hoag assured him. "Do you want to hear it, or don't you?"

Setwick had very little choice in the matter, and he realized it. "Oh, go ahead," he capitulated, wondering how it would do to crawl backward from the sill into the darkness of the room.

Hoag leaned toward him, with the air as of one confiding. "The head-master caught us. Caught us red-handed."

"Book open, fire burning," chanted Felcher.

"He had something very fine to say about the vengeance of heaven," Hoag went on. "We got to laughing at him. He worked up a frenzy. Finally he tried to take heaven's vengeance into his own

hands—tried to visit it on us, in a very primitive way. But it didn't work."

Andoff was laughing immoderately, his fat arms across his bent belly.

"He thought it worked," he supplemented between high gurgles, "but it didn't."

"Nobody could kill us," Felcher added. "Not after the oaths we'd taken, and the promises that had been made us."

"What promises?" demanded Setwick, who was struggling hard not to believe. "Who made you any promises?"

"Those we worshipped," Felcher told him. If he was simulating earnestness, it was a supreme bit of acting. Setwick, realizing this, was more daunted than he cared to show.

"When did all these things happen?" was his next question.

"When?" echoed Hoag. "Oh, years and years ago."

"Years and years ago," repeated Andoff.

"Long before you were born," Felcher assured him.

They were standing close together, their backs to the moon that shone in Setwick's face. He could not see their expressions clearly. But their three voices —Hoag's soft, Felcher's deep and vibrant, Andoff's high and squeaky—were absolutely serious.

"I know what you're arguing within yourself," Hoag announced somewhat smugly. "How can we, who talk about those many past years, seem so young? That calls for an explanation, I'll admit." He paused, as if choosing words. "Time —for us—stands still. It came to a halt on that very night, Setwick; the night our head-master tried to put an end to our worship."

"And to us," smirked the gross-bodied Andoff, with his usual air of self-congratulation at capping one of Hoag's statements.

"The worship goes on," pronounced Felcher, in the same chanting manner that he had affected once before. "The worship goes on, and we go on, too."

"Which brings us to the point," Hoag came in briskly. "Do you want to throw in with us, Setwick?—make the fourth of this lively little party?"

"No, I don't," snapped Setwick vehemently.

THEY fell silent, and gave back a little—a trio of bizarre silhouettes against the pale moon-glow. Setwick could see the flash of their staring eyes among the shadows of their faces. He knew that he was afraid, but hid his fear. Pluckily he dropped from the sill to the ground. Dew from the grass spattered his sock-clad ankles between oxfords and trouser-cuffs.

"I guess it's my turn to talk," he told them levelly. "I'll make it short. I don't like you, nor anything you've said. And I'm getting out of here."

"We won't let you," said Hoag, hushed but emphatic.

"We won't let you," murmured Andoff and Felcher together, as though they had rehearsed it a thousand times.

Setwick clenched his fists. His father had taught him to box. He took a quick, smooth stride toward Hoag and hit him hard in the face. Next moment all three had flung themselves upon him. They did not seem to strike or grapple or tug, but he went down under their assault. The shoulders of his tweed coat wallowed in sand, and he smelled crushed weeds. Hoag, on top of him, pinioned his arms with a kneee on each biceps. Felcher and Andoff were stooping close.

Glaring up in helpless rage, Setwick knew once and for all that this was no schoolboy prank. Never did practical jokers gather around their victim with

such staring, green-gleaming eyes, such drawn jowls, such quivering lips.

Hoag bared white fangs. His pointed tongue quested once over them.

"Knife!" he muttered, and Felcher fumbled in a pocket, then passed him something that sparkled in the moonlight.

Hoag's lean hand reached for it, then whipped back. Hoag had lifted his eyes to something beyond the huddle. He choked and whimpered inarticulately, sprang up from Setwick's laboring chest, and fell back in awkward haste. The others followed his shocked stare, then as suddenly cowered and retreated in turn.

"It's the master!" wailed Andoff.

"Yes," roared a gruff new voice. "Your old head-master—and I've come back to master *you!*"

Rising upon one elbow, the prostrate Setwick saw what they had seen—a tall, thick-bodied figure in a long dark coat, topped with a square, distorted face and a tousle of white locks. Its eyes glittered with their own pale, hard light. As it advanced slowly and heavily it emitted a snigger of murderous joy. Even at first glance Setwick was aware that it cast no shadow.

"I am in time," mouthed the newcomer. "You were going to kill this poor boy."

Hoag had recovered and made a stand. "Kill him?" he quavered, seeming to fawn before the threatening presence. "No. We'd have given him life——"

"You call it life?" trumpeted the long-coated one. "You'd have sucked out his blood to teem your own dead veins, damned him to your filthy condition. But I'm here to prevent you!"

A finger pointed, huge and knuckly, and then came a torrent of language. To the nerve-stunned Setwick it sounded like a bit from the New Testament, or perhaps from the Book of Common Prayer. All at once he remembered Hoag's avowed dislike for such quotations.

His three erstwhile assailants reeled as if before a high wind that chilled or scorched. "No, no! Don't!" they begged wretchedly.

The square old face gaped open and spewed merciless laughter. The knuckly finger traced a cross in the air, and the trio wailed in chorus as though the sign had been drawn upon their flesh with a tongue of flame.

Hoag dropped to his knees. "Don't!" he sobbed.

"I have power," mocked their tormenter. "During years shut up I won it, and now I'll use it." Again a triumphant burst of mirth. "I know you're damned and can't be killed, but you can be tortured! I'll make you crawl like worms before I'm done with you!"

Setwick gained his shaky feet. The long coat and the blocky head leaned toward him.

"Run, you!" dinned a rough roar in his ears. "Get out of here—and thank God for the chance!"

SETWICK ran, staggering. He blundered through the weeds of the driveway, gained the road beyond. In the distance gleamed the lights of Carrington. As he turned his face toward them and quickened his pace he began to weep, chokingly, hysterically, exhaustingly.

He did not stop running until he reached the platform in front of the station. A clock across the street struck ten, in a deep voice not unlike Felcher's. Setwick breathed deeply, fished out his handkerchief and mopped his face. His hand was quivering like a grass stalk in a breeze.

"Beg pardon!" came a cheery hail. "You must be Setwick."

As once before on this same platform, he whirled around with startled speed.

Within touch of him stood a broad-shouldered man of thirty or so, with horn-rimmed spectacles. He wore a neat Norfolk jacket and flannels. A short briar pipe was clamped in a good-humored mouth.

"I'm Collins, one of the masters at the school," he introduced himself. "If you're Setwick, you've had us worried. We expected you on that seven o'clock train, you know. I dropped down to see if I couldn't trace you."

Setwick found a little of his lost wind. "But I've—been to the school," he mumbled protestingly. His hand, still trembling, gestured vaguely along the way he had come.

Collins threw back his head and laughed, then apologized.

"Sorry," he said. "It's no joke if you really had all that walk for nothing. Why, that old place is deserted—used to be a catch-all for incorrigible rich boys. They closed it about fifty years ago, when the head-master went mad and killed three of his pupils. As a matter of coincidence, the master himself died just this afternoon, in the state hospital for the insane."

H. P. L.

By HENRY KUTTNER

Here in the silent places, and the caverns beneath the world,
On the great black altars carven from the stones that the gods have hurled,
Where the gray smoke coils and shudders through the eery purple gleam,
And the shadows of worlds beyond our worlds fall over a dreamer's dream—
Reddened with blood from an alien flesh, pallid as vampire thing,
Dark with the glimpse of supernal night and brushed with an ebon wing,
Pageants of awful majesty pass in a saraband
Like the shadows of Egypt's Titan gods far-flung on the changeless sand.

Only a few may taste the cup that none but the gods can drain;
Valhalla is lost to the stolid throng of the peaceful and warm and sane;
Evil, they say, is the lonely night where it is not good to be,
Chilled with the cold that is more than cold, paying the dreamer's fee,
Resting on couches of asphodel, resting and wonder-drowned,
Ageless and lost to a humdrum world, with magic and glory crowned,
Facing the gates of the universe, breasting the mighty stream
That bursts from the roots of Yggdrasil, in the splendor of a dream.

McGovern's Obsession

By AUGUST W. DERLETH

The story of a crime that occurred in the old house—a crime and a retribution

HE MOVED into the Hounslow house in April, and put his name-plate on the gate-post: Alexander McGovern. The house had been redecorated and painted, and some plants put in here and there. It was all in all a most satisfactory building in appearance, and one about which McGovern could make no complaint, unless it was that the air of it was not quite right. He considered taking this matter up with the agents, but upon sober reflection, it struck him as somewhat absurd and unjustifiable, and he went on adjusting himself to the place as rapidly as possible. His manservant established himself, and he made certain of sending Brooks into every conceivable corner of the house, so that the man might know where the things were to be kept.

In a week's time he felt at home, but the *air* continued to bother him. It was not a smell, nor dampness, but just a vague sense of something wrong; he could not define it, and several times he caught himself looking suddenly into the mirror as if expecting to see someone else there, but saw only his own mild gray eyes, his neat mustache, his fussy mouth and thinning hair. He could not understand this feeling, and when he thought of it, it bothered him. He began to have the impression as of something important he had left undone, and he cast repeatedly around in his orderly mind for some trivial omission upon which to fasten his unaccountable sense of forgetting.

On his second Sunday in the house, he had just sat down to read the papers in the evening, when he remembered that he had forgotten to send his grocer a check on Saturday, and straightway he rose and went to his writing-desk to carry out this small duty. He arranged his note-paper before him with almost feminine neatness, and proceeded to write.

"Oscar Peeper, Esquire
37 Grigg Street
London, S. W. 1
"Dear Sir:

"I enclose herewith my check for two pounds, seven shillings, three pence . . ."

At this point, McGovern felt suddenly a twinge and shock in his right arm: only a momentary hesitation, however: and then his hand began to move over the paper with incredible speed. He was at first acquiescent, but immediately it occurred to him that he did not know what he was writing. He felt an impulse to stop, but his hand did not obey; it went on as if it were something apart from the rest of his body, traversing line after line of his note-paper. Finally, by main force, McGovern dragged his hand away from the paper and sat aghast at what he had written.

In the first place, there was a distinct difference between the style of the script in which he had begun his letter and in which it was finished. But the letter itself was an even more painful surprize.

"Dear Sir:

"I enclose herewith my check for two

pounds, seven shillings, three pence . . . *I am sure he has not mailed my letter, but there is no way for me to find out. The telephone has been disconnected, or something has been done to it to prevent its use, and I don't know how to get out. I am only certain I am not meant to get out or to write to anyone. Oh, my poor Frederic, what are we to do? That this innocent pleasure of ours might lead to this is inconceivable! And especially so since I know this is for him just a pretext to further his own desires. He has been seeing Esther, I know, but I have not cared . . .*"

The script was definitely in a woman's hand; there could be no question of that, and that was all the more amazing. McGovern, who was a prosaic man, began to yield to subconscious suggestion and feel bilious; it was a convenient way in which to account for the action of his hand, even if it was too far-fetched to explain his having written in this angular feminine script. He read the whole thing over again, beginning with his own line, which seemed absurd in comparison to the suggestion inherent in the remainder.

THERE was no explaining it, even though the broken narrative seemed logically enough the writing of someone imprisoned in a house. That it might be his house did not occur to McGovern. His hand had written something his mind had not dictated, and there was no explanation of the incident unless he chose to regard it as a brief manifestation of some obsession risen from the fastnesses of his brain. This was as far as McGovern chose to consider it at all: the immediate physical act and its strangeness, passing entirely over its implications.

It was not, even from this point of view, a pleasant thought, and he put the letter away, resisting an impulse to destroy it because he was too methodical to do away with what might be used later as evidence if ever he chose to mention his strange experience at the club. He resolved to forget all about it until he could approach the problem more rationally.

But it troubled him. It troubled him to such an extent that he went around to pay the grocer in person, actually hesitating to take pen in hand and so risk another manifestation of his mental illness.

For a few days he studiously avoided writing anything, but one afternoon he was called to the telephone and had to make a note. He forgot his experience, pulled over the telephone pad, and took up the pencil. He had just put down, "*Salar the Salmon:* Henry Williamson: 7/6" when his hand clamped hard upon the pencil and he began to write just as he had written a few days before. He stuttered into the telephone and hung up, but his hand kept dizzily on, flowing over the paper with marvelous agility and ease. He could not stop it, and it was not until all the writing surface had been exhausted that he was able to drop the pencil and bend forward to read what his hand had this time put down.

". . . *and I would never care. He knows that, I am sure. But I do not understand what he means to do. He was very strange at dinner today; he said something about remodeling his room, and later I heard him hammering around in there. If only I could get out of the window! But there is nothing to cling to, and it is too high from the ground to jump.*

"*The worst of it is that he has not said one word to me about Frederic, but I know he thinks of him, and I keep catching his eyes fixed on me in an odd way, an evil way, I sometimes believe. Perhaps I am losing my mind, but small wonder, if so, for this confinement is maddening, and I am afraid—terribly afraid, when I think of it.*"

It was in the same feminine hand, and a comparison with the first evidence of his strange obsession indicated that this was but a continuation of what had been begun then.

McGovern tore off the sheet and put it away with the letter. He had so convincing a feeling that he was being watched,

that he turned several times and scrutinized the dim shadows rising within the room in the late afternoon sunlight. He was beginning to feel most uncomfortable. If the writing were all, he could doubtless find some logical explanation of it to soothe his mind, but the strangeness of the atmosphere persisted. It was utterly beyond McGovern's comprehension because the house was a neat, if somewhat secluded residence, not too dark, and certainly not damp, as so many houses were.

In the evening he went to the club, determined to unburden himself, but there he saw old Philibert, whom he had not seen for months. The old man saw him, too, almost at his entrance, and sat fixing him with his eyes over his spectacles, his mouth ready to hail him when his gaze should be met.

"Philibert!" exclaimed McGovern. "Where've you been?"

"Where have *you* been, you mean," said Philibert. "I've been here all the time."

"I've moved. A nice quiet place not far from here—Hounslow. An enclosed little house with a nice garden and lawns and a good strong wall all around."

Philibert looked interested. "Not number twenty-seven, Stobridge Road?"

"That's it."

"The old Helmsworth place!" exclaimed Philibert. "So they finally sold it, eh?"

"It's a good place," said McGovern, faintly surprized.

"By all means," agreed Philibert enthusiastically. "But the agents have had a devil of a time getting rid of it. Doctor Helmsworth's fault. He moved out right after the scandal and put it up for sale. Henson & Greeb had it, I remember. No sooner would they find a prospective buyer than Helmsworth would decide he hadn't ought to sell it. He kept that up for—now, let me see—almost two years, I think. It's a wonder he gave in now, but I suppose even sentiment wears thin at last."

"What scandal?" asked McGovern bluntly.

Philibert roused himself. "You don't know it, of course, being more or less new here, but his wife ran off with a young actor: Frederic Borster. He'd suspected it all along, but hadn't been prepared for that. She simply vanished; he found her gone and the actor, too, when he got back from a shooting in Scotland. Terrible shock, of course, but just between us, it couldn't have been so bad, because there'd been talk about one of his patients: a rich young lady who pretended to a bit of poetry now and then."

"I don't suppose he kept her locked up there?" said McGovern. "His wife, that is."

What impelled his casual question, McGovern himself could not have said. It came out despite his attentive listening, and brought Philibert up short.

"What an extraordinary idea!" exclaimed the old man. "You don't know Doctor Helmsworth, that's obvious. He's a mild young man with pale eyes; looks weak-willed as a rabbit. He hasn't gone far away—just a street or two down. Now, of course, he's going to marry again; he's getting his final decree in a day or two. He put off divorcing her for all this while—that's the kind of weak sentimentalist he is."

By this time McGovern's mind had functioned sufficiently to take note of the point of similarity between Philibert's narrative and his own obsession: the woman's *Frederic;* and quite of his own accord he asked,

"Whom is Doctor Helmsworth marrying?"

"The rich patient, of course," replied Philibert casually.

"What's her name?"

Philibert looked at him coldly. "Esther Owen, I think. Why?"

Esther!

McGovern licked his lips nervously. "Do you know anyone who might have known Mrs. Helmsworth well enough to have still about something she might have written?" he asked cautiously.

Philibert began to draw himself suspiciously away. "My dear fellow, the woman bought books from me for a year or so before her disappearance. No doubt I could find letters from her in my files. But what in the devil interests you about her?"

McGovern invented an excuse which even he recognized as feeble, but he persuaded Philibert to take him home and show him the letters. After a bit of bickering, he got Philibert to part with one of them, and left him.

In the street he sought a lamp and took from his pocket the sheet from the telephone pad, and compared it with Philibert's letter.

It was the same writing. There was not a shred of doubt about that.

McGovern had reached the point at which any rational man is at a loss. Rationalization being impossible, his mind kept wanting to reject the tangible evidence of his senses, and this held him in a fog of uncertainty; he was caught between doubt of the factual evidence that was his and hesitation at going beyond the bounds of reason to explain it. He had some dim acquaintance with the subject of automatic writing, but it was characteristic of him that it should not at that time have occurred to him.

He made his way slowly homeward. When he stepped into the house he was sharply surprized that Brooks was not there waiting for him; then it came to him with a shock that his man never waited, but that nevertheless he had *expected* someone to be waiting for him, and moreover, he now had the feeling that he had been seen safely home and that someone was *welcoming* him back. The impression was uncanny; the word was a felicitous choice, because there was about the entire house this strange, intangible atmosphere of watchful *waiting*.

He put on the light and sat down to the evidence of his obsession, though he was beginning vaguely to think of it in other terms. The first letter, the sheet from the telephone pad, and the letter from Mrs. Helmsworth to Philibert he laid out in a row before him. He checked over the writing to the minutest detail, comparing the loop of every *e* and *l*, the crossing of every *t*. The result would have been convincing even if he had been a far greater skeptic than he was.

Even admitting to himself that somehow, unconsciously, he had written in Mrs. Helmsworth's hand—and indeed he had!—the meaning of the words he had put down eluded him completely. If she had run off with Frederic Borster, obviously she had got away, and this factual evidence of her confinement was of no particular value. He was annoyed at his train of thought, because what he had to consider was not direct evidence; everything that Philibert had told him could be challenged, and there was nothing to prove that he had done this writing through any other agency than his own, performing only a very clever imitation for some ulterior motive not clear to an unbiased inquirer. Except, of course, the fact that though he had never known Mrs. Helmsworth he had yet written in her hand, and the further coincidences of the names *Frederic* and *Esther*.

After he had got over his annoyance, he was still conscious of a feeling of dis-

pleasure and irritation pressing upon him from outside, as if the house and the very air in it were tiring of his ceaseless circling about his problem.

He put the letters away and went upstairs to bed, where he went to sleep as easily as if he had no trouble in the world. Unfortunately, he did not sleep long.

In the night he felt his arm ache and pain, and rose up; he felt his entire body tingle and shudder, and he was impelled to step out of bed and move across his room to the door, to open it and step into the hall, and go from there downstairs. He was well aware of what he was doing, but he was curiously withdrawn, as if he were seeing himself from some distant vantage-point. And he knew he was not dreaming because he struck his ankle against the newel post on the stairs, and felt the pain of it.

He went into the store-room downstairs, got out a hammer, and went back to his bedroom, where he turned on a small lamp and began to circle the walls, pulling the bed away and pushing behind it. All this time his arm throbbed and ached, and there was an eagerness about it as if it were some impatient animal straining to escape its leash.

THE place he sought in the wall was not far from the head of his bed; he struck the plaster a tentative blow and brought down a small shower of it. He moved the bed a little more out of his way and attacked the wall again. A lath snapped, and more plaster broke away. He persisted until a section of the wall had been torn away and he could look behind it and see what was there: bones, clothes, and two skulls looking up at him. He was not the least bit surprized.

When he heard someone knock on the door, he knew it was Brooks, disturbed by his pounding, and he replied at once in a firm voice a little husky and unlike his.

"Brooks, I'm not feeling well; I want you to go at once and get Doctor Charles Helmsworth. He's down the street, at number 107. Bring him back with you."

He heard Brooks hurry away, and looked at his watch: past midnight. He peered at the bones again and took in their faintly unpleasant odor. Then he sat down patiently to wait. He felt that the room and everything in it waited with him.

Brooks came back. There were footsteps on the stairs, and in a moment the doctor stood on the threshold: still very young-looking, with his pale blue eyes and curly blond hair, his hat held deferentially in one hand and his bag in the other. Brooks stood nervously beyond.

"You may go, Brooks," said McGovern.

Helmsworth looked across the room to the broken wall; then he took a hasty step backward and closed the door. He put his bag down and scrutinized McGovern speculatively.

McGovern knew instantly. It was Helmsworth, and there was something wrong about him: he was mad.

The doctor reached nimbly behind McGovern and took up the hammer with a calmness so unnatural that McGovern stepped instinctively back, still apart from himself. Helmsworth smiled; it was not a nice smile, lips curling back over his teeth, and the light caught in his glasses and reflected there, giving him a demoniac appearance.

"You and your man are alone," said Helmsworth with deadly quiet, and with the speed of a Belisha beacon winking off he brought the hammer down.

The blow was glancing, but it sent McGovern to his knees. He knelt, waiting almost passively for another, but it did not come, and he marveled dimly at the

way in which his right arm and hand seemed to swell, to detach itself from his body even while pulling it along as it rose toward the doctor's neck so clear in the lamplight between the ends of his muffler hanging down.

McGovern got off scot free. He confided to his barrister that he had all along a peaceful sensation of having brought about some desired end and felt that he would be acquitted. Moreover, his hand was normal again, his obsession gone.

"The letters were a point, of course," said his barrister coldly, for he was an unimaginative man. "And the identification of the bodies as those of his wife and young Borster had a share in the jury's decision. But the point they could not get around was the marks on Helmsworth's neck: the hand wasn't yours, not so stubby, and very definitely a woman's hand, the prints clear beyond doubt."

"I suppose," mused McGovern absently, "it got tired of just writing letters for the benefit of such an unseeing person as me."

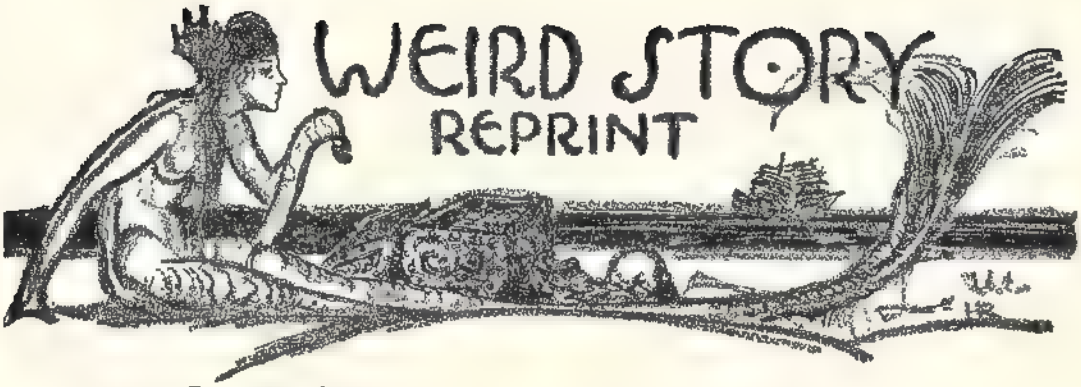
The barrister looked at him strangely, and having pocketed his fee, sidled quietly toward the door, but McGovern did not mind in the least.

The Dream and the Shadow

By ROBERT E. HOWARD

I dreamed a stony idol striding came
  Out of the shadows of a brooding land,
  And drew me, with unspoken, grim command
Into the dark. He named a monstrous Name,
And when I shrank with more than earthly shame,
  He raised me high, gripped in his granite hand,
  And crushed me—then to stain the silver sand,
My blood dripped down in jets of crimson flame.

I woke, and cold with horror of this dream,
  Rose in my bed, crossed white with moonlight's bars.
    Sudden a monstrous shadow seemed to loom
Above my bed; I lay and could not scream.
  Across the sky a shadow passed like doom,
    And for an instant, blotted out the stars.



When The Graves Were Opened*

By ARTHUR J. BURKS

FOOL! Idiot! Imbecile!

I get a certain satisfaction in writing the above words characterizing myself. How feeble they are to express my own opinion of myself! But I hope that someone else, reading them, will pull up smartly and turn over a new leaf. For there are in this world many others who look at things as did I; who thoughtlessly condemn themselves out of their own mouths, never stopping to think of tomorrow and the countless tomorrows after that which stretch away into all eternity.

Be satisfied, I beseech you, to walk in the faith of your fathers! For those whose logical theories you heed and follow are powerless to help you beyond the curtain! They are nothing but empty words, written by people who tear down when they have infinite capacities for building.

Read and take heed!

But back to the beginning. I forgot for the moment that, over there where you are, there is still such a non-understandable thing as Time. I am writing back from eternity to those who, living still, may be induced to ponder for a moment to recall that life, which takes less than a fleeting instant out of Time, is very sweet.

Know then that I was an atheist, a blasphemer, an iconoclast, a destroyer of images! I mocked at the gods of my fathers, pointing out to all who would listen that those gods had feet of clay. I laughed in huge enjoyment at what I conceived to be the crude records of Moses and the Apostles, calling them the teachings of false prophets.

I had delved into the deeper sciences and that delving had killed the faith I had taken out into the world with me from my mother's knee. Not so, however, with my dearest friend Harvey Hesford. And he had delved deeper into science than I ever had, but holding fast to his faith meanwhile. To him science was but the instrument by which he hoped to prove, once and for all, that there is a God and that God is good. And he had enough of this world's goods to make it unnecessary for him to labor for hire. What he learned he told no one.

* From WEIRD TALES for December, 1925.

He called me on the telephone to tell me that he had just perfected the latest invention upon which he had been working and he wished me to run over to his workshop to see it.

I ran over to Harvey's workshop.

The memory of those tense moments there will go with me to the end of Time. Time! Ha! Ha! There is no Time! Just limitless Nothingness, peopled by——

But wait!

HARVEY met me at the door, and his face was white and strained. I smiled at him and looked over his shoulders into the shop. He was always getting excited over his inventions—and well he might, since, had he ever made them public, the whole world would have become excited to keep him company. His inventions were like that. But as I say, I looked over his shoulders into the workshop, which I hadn't entered for several months, owing to the heavy pressure of my own affairs. We had been in daily touch, however, for we took luncheon together with a faithfulness that had made the daily affairs somewhat of a ritual. And always our meals were punctuated with never-ending argument. I was an iconoclast, remember, and Harvey believed as his mother had taught him to believe. I can't seem to keep to my story! What I started to say was that, beyond Harvey Hesford, I saw a huge bit of machinery that, at first glimpse, seemed terribly unwieldy. It captured my interest at once and I pushed Hesford aside, moving past him to examine this child of his brain at closer range. And what a machine! Unwieldy in the mass, yet compounded of wires, filaments and threads that would have conceivably vanished at a fairy's breath. I can't describe it, but I can tell you what it did.

"Name it and take it!" I said facetiously. "What is it, Harvey?"

Harvey frowned slightly, as though I had said something irreverent.

"Gibbons," he said in awed tones, "I have perfected a machine which will answer, once and for all, the greatest question which man has ever asked! Since the beginning of civilization man has asked, 'Why?' This machine annihilates what we know as time! It turns back the hands until the one who investigates can, through this machine, drop back, a living entity, into any period of man's remote past that he may desire! By sitting in this seat, with this apparatus attached to your body in various places, you have but to make a wish—a wish to travel backward through the ages, and your wish is granted with the speed of light itself!"

I looked at Harvey for a stupefied moment. Then I threw back my head and laughed! Harvey regarded me with grave concern. To him it was assuredly no laughing matter. He knew!

"Fine!" I said quickly. "I'll be the first one to try out your supernatural contraption! Here, I take my seat! Strap on the wires! So! You know, Harvey, there is one thing I have always wanted settled. With this machine, if the thing works, I can have the question answered. I wish, then, to be taken back through the centuries, to stand on Golgotha during the Crucifixion! For the Apostles have said, Harvey, that, upon the death of the Carpenter, the 'heavens were rent in twain'; that 'the graves gave up their dead'; that 'the dead arose and went immediately into the city.' But, Harvey, old chap, here the story stops! What I want to know is: what became of the dead after they went into the city? Did they take up the threads of life where they had dropped them on their deathbeds? Did they become in all matters the same as they had been during their previous lives? I have often wondered, and now you can help me to settle a moot question—a question

which neither the Apostles nor secular history deign to answer!"

Harvey's hand, upraised to touch a white-nubbed button behind my head, paused in the act and began to tremble violently. I saw his white face go whiter still and the fine dew break forth upon his forehead. When he bent to look into my eyes and to speak to me, his voice trembled, too.

"Jess," he said, in a voice so low I could scarcely hear it, "my dearest friend, Jess! For years I have listened to your blasphemies—for years I have looked at you in wonder while you propounded your terrible and searching propositions—and always I have watched you spellbound, expecting that the wrath of the Lord would descend upon your head from the heavens, and wipe you off the face of the earth! Why it has not done so, He only knows! Jess, this machine, upon which I have gone a hundred times farther than did Edison on his 'spirit' machine, will do just as I have claimed for it. If you wish to go back to Golgotha you will do just that—when I press this little button. Think, Jess! If you believed that it would work would you still wish to go back?"

"Sure!" I retorted. "Always providing that you could bring me back to the present when the experiment was finished!"

"I can do that," replied Harvey softly.

Harvey's hand, which had dropped to his side as he spoke, raised once more and hovered over the fateful button.

"Wait!" I cried, grinning as I thought to add a final ironic touch to the farce; "if you can send my astral body back through time, why can't I send messages back to my corporeal housing here and make my mundane hands record what I see? Place pencil and paper before me and, if this monster works, maybe I'll have a lot to write about!"

You see I had faith in my own strange beliefs, too. Frankly, I felt assured that nothing whatever would happen when he pressed the button. And when Harvey moved away to bring paper and pencil, which he placed on top of a table across my legs, I was sure of it. I almost laughed anew at his portentous gravity. His hand went once more to the button.

"Are you ready, Jess?" he asked. "And God have mercy on your soul!"

"You sound like an executioner turning on the juice!" I cried.

And in that instant he pressed the button!

How can I describe that next instant? A great shock, as of many volts of electricity, surged through me. Still with that thought of the executioner turning on the "juice" in my mind, the actual happening was startling, to say the least. Pinpoints of light danced before my eyes, and Harvey's workshop vanished from view as though the wand of a magician had passed over it.

I seemed to be floating, gently as a bit of down in a light breeze, through limitless space. I say "gently" because that was my impression although, weirdly enough, I seemed to be traveling with terrific speed. I tried to look about me, sought for view of my hands, feet and body, but could see nothing. I was nothing but mentality! I called it "mentality" even then. But I tell you now that it was the *me* of my corporeal body; that I was a soul that had been released! Perhaps Hesford himself can not explain to you just why this is so; but I, being a free spirit now, can do so. This, then, was what his machine did to me: It merely separated my soul from my body (call it death if you will), while at the same time, this machine, where Edison's failed, is sensitive to messages from the spirit world, allowing me to send back this

story. It has no power to project a spirit into the past as Hesford claimed for it—of itself! But I, now, can project myself into the past as you understand the past! For over here there is no such thing as past, present, or future! I am a spark from the Divine Flame, which is All-Powerful, Omniscient. The past lies before me as an open book, from which I may read as I will. And because I left the earth with a blasphemy on my lips, I have elected to go back to Golgotha in very truth, as I but said in jest to Harvey, to satisfy myself of the facts in the case.

Out of the limitless spaces through which I had been hurled with such speed as no man may conceive I began slowly to descend toward the earth which, dim and hazy, came up out of the void toward me. Just a huge ball it was, at first, ringed with patches of white vapor in which the sun drew pictures the color of blood. I had a sensation of coolness as I passed through the clouds above the earth, to see the earth itself below me.

I landed lightly in a narrow street in a strange city—a city that rang with the crazed shouts of a multitude of men, women, and children—people dressed in clothing that might have been taken bodily from illustrations in the Books of the Apostles! They were moving, a vast concourse, toward the center of the city.

Need I mention that city's name?

I CAME down to them out of the clouds, but the people among whom I dropped paid me no heed—which was natural in that they could not see me. I followed them as they hurried, studying the faces on all sides. They were shouting, as I have said, and, though they spoke a language which I had never heard before, I understood every word—and the most common, the most oft-repeated, were these:

"Away with him! Crucify him!"

My heart grew cold within me. I have no heart, you understand, but I experienced a sensation which would have called for that remark up there in the dim and distant future with you who read this. In that instant I knew what was to come. My feet (pardon me) were heavy as though shod with lead.

Then I stood beneath a canopy upon a raised platform at one side of a great square. Before me were many important-looking officials who wore the beautiful togas of the Roman pontiffs. And these, as they walked about, glanced nervously at the screaming crowd in the square outside, and their brows were lined with worry—lines in which the fine dew had collected, the dew of mental torture. Then they would look away from the crowd toward another and more important-looking man who sat upon a dais above the platform. It was plain that, worried with fear though they were, they were still glad that the great decision for which the crowd was clamoring was up to the man on the dais. Indecision was in the man's face, writ large where his subordinates, and also those in the broad square, might see and read. The man thrust one foot forward as though he would rise up from his seat. The crowd in the courtyard shrieked anew, clamoring for a word from the Roman governor.

Pontius Pilate was being called upon to decide!

He left his dais and approached the edge of the platform. His eyes searched the crowd before him.

Take care! Pontius Pilate, take care! Upon your decision rests the life-blood of generations yet unborn!

Then spoke Pontius Pilate, waving a trembling hand toward the screaming crowd:

"What would ye that we do to this man who calls himself King of the Jews?"

As one voice came the many-throated cry of the blood-mad crowd:

"Crucify him! Crucify him!"

Pilate waved his hand in resignation, turned about and beckoned to one of his officers. This one departed, to return shortly with a basin of water. Pontius Pilate, turning his back upon the scene in the courtyard, began to lave his hands!

Oh, for a corporeal body, that I might make myself known to Pontius Pilate! That I might warn him of this terrible thing which he did! Think you, Pontius, that all the washing of hands which you may do throughout eternity can wash that one ghastly stain from your guilty hands? Turn again, Pilate, turn again! I rushed to him and tugged frantically at his toga. He paid me no attention; for I was but an entity who must wait nineteen hundred years to be born! He could not know that I was there—that I represented the people yet to come who would be affected by this great decision which the Roman governor had made. It was useless, hopeless, impossible! Sadly I turned back to view the scene in the courtyard.

Would that I possessed the brush of a Leonardo da Vinci to reproduce that scene! That I were gifted with the genius of Milton in telling what I saw!

For in that courtyard I saw Him Whom all my life I have doubted! Weary unto death, with the great wooden beam across his back, that beam with its significant cross-bar. He winced with pain as the leather-thonged whip of His murderers scored His beloved flesh. Many there were who laughed at Him and reviled Him, cursing Him with unspeakable epithets.

God the Father! Could they not see, as could I, that nebulous, golden circle of heavenly radiance which rested, a Father's benediction, upon that pain-furrowed brow?

Surely not, else they would have known that He needed no other crown to proclaim His Kingship! But they could not see, and when one of the soldiers fashioned, amid the laughter of his fellows, a ghastly crown of piercing thorns, they cheered with a many-throated voice that must have gone back to Pontius Pilate, causing him to pause again in doubt as he methodically laved his hands.

The soldier moved forward while I, powerless to prevent, although my whole soul cried out against this horror, could but follow his movements with eyes that were heavy with sorrow and dread. When the fellow placed the ghastly crown upon that kingly head, and the drops of blood which He gave for the redemption of mankind came down in crimson jets to dot His face, I winced as though my head had received that crown.

For the first time since I had forsworn my mother's teachings I prayed! Was it imagination, or did that noble brow, taut with the pain of the world's sins, grow smooth for a single instant?

I, of all that vast concourse, save One, could look into the future and see what this great scene signified. In my mind's eye I saw the hordes from the European continent which marched in the Crusades to regain the Holy Sepulcher! I saw their blood grow red against a thousand sunsets. I saw, and felt, each and every one of the pain-creating contrivances that made of the Spanish Inquisition a period of such horror that the world will never forget. I saw the terrible Duke of Alva lay waste the Netherlands. And I knew that the fault of all this horror lay with one man who, back beside his dais, representing his kingly authority, among his subservient inferiors, laved his hands to wash away a stain that nothing could ever erase this side of the end of Time. Do you think, Pontius Pilate, thus lightly to alter the very souls of the countless multitudes yet to be born into the world?

Out of the limitless spaces where dwell the yet-unborn I wonder what vast multitudes of entities did not look down upon this outrage, seeing then what it all meant to them when, hundreds and thousands of years hence, they would make up the populations of London, New York, Berlin and all the other cities of the earth, knowing as they looked that, when they came into the world, they would recall none of it.

Of this I thought as, following the multitude—slowly, as though I were burdened with a bit of the heavy Cross which bent the back of the Nazarene—we went out of the city and came to the Rock that was like a skull. I know that those unborn multitudes watched it too, for I was one of them and could see them all about me, stretching away in countless hordes toward the outer limits of space. And we, all of us together, were powerless to aid Him Who was giving his life that we might live!

2

OF THAT long, slow pilgrimage to the place of the Crucifixion there are writers who have, witnesses at the time, spoken the last word. My words will die as time passes; theirs will live as long as humanity lives. For their words are a part of the Book. But perhaps it seemed different to them than to me; I can not say as to that, for when three men see a certain thing come to pass, and go away to tell about it, the result will be three different versions, no two of them alike. Perhaps mine is different from all the others. So be it. I try to repeat what I saw.

I will begin where the three crosses first stood upright upon Golgotha. In the center the Divine Nazarene, with a thief on his right and a thief on his left. Of the three, only He wore a crown, a ghastly crown of thorns. Imagine it if you can! A naked body composed of living, quivering flesh—housing a soul—and hanging suspended by three cruel nails, two through the hands, one through the feet, the knees slightly bent so that the body would hang in the most painful position; His body, since it was a human body after all, quivered with terrible pain, His lips were dry and parched and His throat worked harshly, like a great pulse. Blood dropped steadily from the three great wounds to make a trio of little puddles on Golgotha. His face was streaked as though with sweat, from the blood which the crown of thorns had drawn from His brow and which had dried upon His fevered face. Had His weight rested upon His wide-flung arms alone, His wrists merely bound to the cross-bar, terrible would have been the pain, yet think what unspeakable agony He must have suffered when, His body sagging heavily as the life went out of Him, it served to widen the wounds in His hands—a tearing ghastly and bloody, that would not cease until He came down from the cross.

Yet with every reason to hate and despise those who were doing this to Him, His lips moved and I heard the feeble words:

"Forgive them, Father, for they know not what they do!"

Give heed, then, to the words of the thief on His left:

"What are you saying, dog of a Nazarene? You who have performed miracles when no one molested you, why do you not command that we be taken down from our crosses? You are a false prophet, whose mouth is full of words. You are more evil than I, for I am a thief and pretend to be nothing else; you are no different from me, except that you have lived a lie. Look at those words above your head! But of course you can not see them. I shall read them to you:

'Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews!' If ye be indeed a king, and not a liar, command that we be taken down from the cross!"

The Nazarene made no answer. But I saw the increased activity of the pulse in His throat. The thief laughed harshly and cursed the Nazarene with every oath in his vocabulary, heaped His thorn-crowned head with obscenities.

When the thief on His right spoke to Him kindly, I saw Him smile a smile that must have been born in Paradise. I heard Him barely whisper that great promise to the thief who had been kind.

And the people who had brought Him there stood below and waited, wondering why He took so long to die. He thanked the soldier who pressed the vinegar-soaked sponge against His lips.

For several hours we waited there, an expectant multitude. I wondered if the others saw it—that thunderous black cloud which was gathering in the west as it rolled up to hide the face of the dying sun. A cloud that was like a vast tapestry of billowing black smoke. When the face of the sun was hidden and the cloud had closed in upon Golgotha, hiding the cross-bars of the crosses from sight, leaving only the limbs of the dying men in view, I heard, far away in the distance, the menacing roll of approaching thunder. The cloud now covered the earth like a blanket, a blanket that was thick and smothering, broken here and there in flurried rifts across which leaped tongues of fiery lightning—which crisped and crackled like whips that are flicked by invisible hands. Golgotha was heavy beneath the vast and awesome power of a Might Immeasurable.

Down by those who waited, trembling now with a fright which none could understand or explain, came those words of the Great Nazarene in mortal pain:

"Father have mercy!"

Came a rift in the cloud which hovered about the Cross, a rift through which I could see His face—a rift across which darted and crackled those powerful whips of the lightnings. They illumined His face and made it beautiful, a glow of heavenly radiance upon which the waiting multitude looked in fear and awe. But those great eyes were sightless, the thorn-crowned head sunk low.

The soldier raised his spear and pierced the side of the Christ, and the water and the blood gushed forth, while tongues of lightning darted down as though they would cleanse the wound with fire. The soldier, standing with his neck craned upward to view his handiwork, gaped as he saw this, his mouth hanging open like that of a gasping fish. Then he turned and ran, brandishing his spear to intimidate those who barred his flight.

Jesus of Nazareth had given up the Ghost!

I TURNED to retrace my steps into the city when, borne on the breeze which had dropped down to scatter the clouds which covered Golgotha, there came to my nostrils the vast and terrible effluvium of a thousand cemeteries that had been convulsed until the graves fell open! The ghastly odor of long-dead and decayed mortality! Such an odor as is said forever to hang in the weird atmosphere over Egypt! I knew what had happened. And my return led through one of the city's cemeteries!

I came to the edge of that cemetery and paused to take in the awesome sight. On all sides of me, open to the air of heaven gaped the mouths of graves. Stones that had covered many of them for scores of years had been lifted and hurled aside—stones that could not have been moved by half a dozen strong men had been cast upward and aside by the seek-

ing hands of those who had come forth. The graveyard might have been a vast battleground, did one judge from appearances; a battleground upon which had been hurled the equipment of a fleeing army.

For those who had arisen had left their shrouds and cerements at the lips of their tombs! Naked they had gone forth, born again into the world. Near at hand I saw a shroud that had once been white, but that now was yellowish and covered in spots by bits of mold from the bosom of Mother Earth. Here, a little farther away, lay a shroud that would still have been white, had it not been for the drops of dried blood which hinted what manner of death he, or she, who had lain within its ample folds had died.

No odor hung over this field of the dead who had arisen, for the breath of heaven had washed it clean. But there was a smell that reminded me of June mornings, such as I have spent up there in the future with you, when the rain has passed over with the coming of the sun and the earth smells sweet and clean. It hinted of life instead of death. I could almost hear the upward creeping of living plants and grasses that, already, were striving to peep forth from the earth to hide the face of this dread place.

I hurried on into the city, and found myself in the rear of a multitude which moved on ahead of me.

I knew that I walked with those who had just come forth from their graves! Who had just now cast aside their shrouds!

Upon their faces I read many and varied questions. Upon them all sat expressions of inexpressible bewilderment. They but answered in a body to some great mandate, and could not understand why they answered.

Were they glad to be back in the land of the living?

I do not know. But I thought I read in the faces of those nearest me, mingled with the bewilderment which was common to all, a look of brooding discontent. I believed then that, had the dead the right to choose as they would, the graves would nevermore have been opened. The thought of dying but once is terrible, a thought that haunts us all; but when one knows that one must die a second time it seems rather an undeserved punishment than a blessing. Their bodies were whole, as they had been whole in their previous life and, as far as appearances went, it was hard to believe that this multitude had ever been dead.

I hurried on through the marching crowd of the risen dead until I came and walked at its forefront. I was still the seeker after knowledge. I wished to know what these people would do when they came again into the city whence, moving slowly and in silence, they had gone forth to what the world had called their final resting-place.

We found ourselves at the edge of the city. Long before we had reached it, however, we had seen figures of men and women fleeing on ahead, looking back at us as though we were specters that pursued. We heard their frightened cries as they brandished their arms wildly:

"Make way! Make way; for the dead have come forth! Flee for your lives!"

This the greeting to those loved ones who had every right to expect joyous welcomes! Their own people fled from them as though they were filthy with some loathsome plague! Did the people welcome the dead returned? Would they do it up there with you?

The cries had gone ahead of us into the city, and the little army with which I, the invisible entity, marched, was met at the wall by a centurion and his men.

He held up his hand to bar our farther progress:

"Stand!" he cried loudly, although I sensed that his voice trembled with fear; "and tell me whence you come, and for what purpose."

Beside me a venerable patriarch folded his arms and gazed into the eyes of the centurion as he answered:

"Know ye, fool of a soldier, that I am Tobias the money-changer! Why are we ordered to stand?"

The soldier made as though to flee, restraining his natural impulse with all his power.

"But I knew Tobias the money-changer," he cried, "and I say that he has been dead two years!"

"True," replied the patriarch, "but, I say that I am that Tobias; that I am not dead but living!"

The centurion was visibly trembling.

"Whence come ye?" His voice was barely audible.

"From the graves beyond Golgotha!" replied the patriarch. "We are the dead who have arisen, for what purpose I know not, except that we find ourselves here, received with but scanty welcome. Why are we ordered to stand?"

"Word has gone forth to Pilate that an unknown army marches upon the city —an army without arms in its hands. You stand at his orders."

"Take word to him that the dead have returned and seek entry to the city in order that they may return to their homes!"

The centurion turned and spoke sharply to one of his men, glad of the opportunity to salve his fright with a show of authority.

I LEFT the army of the dead at this place and followed the soldier on until he sought his audience with Pilate. I heard him, panting with his exertions, kneeling before Pilate, repeat this message:

"The word is abroad in the city that the graves have opened and have given up their dead! The dead themselves send word that they wish to return to their homes!"

Pilate arose from his dais and strode forth among his subordinates.

"What is the meaning of this? What riddle are you making me when you speak of the dead arisen?"

"The truth," answered the trembling soldier; "I but repeat the words of Tobias the money-changer, who marches at the head of the resurrected!"

"Did you see him? Are you sure that it is indeed Tobias?"

"Yea, it is Tobias! I knew him well by sight, for he was once high in the counsel of Herod, and was well known! It is indeed he!"

"When did the dead come forth?"

Up spoke an officer of Pilate's guard.

"Word had but just come to us that he who called himself 'King of the Jews' had died on the cross! Immediately afterward came word of an earthquake which caused Golgotha to tremble and which opened the graves above the dead!"

Pilate's face became a livid mask.

"What is this thing that we have done? Who is He Whom we have given to be crucified? It must never be known that we passed our word for the slaying of a great prophet! They would laugh at us from the ends of the earth! They might even cause another governor to be appointed!"

Pilate looked around him at his people as though he sought for one upon whom to place the blame for this great catastrophe.

One of his subordinates touched him obsequiously upon the shoulder.

"Pilate has spoken well," he said. "It must never be known! I have a plan to

prevent certain knowledge from going forth!"

"Speak!" commanded Pilate.

"Beyond the limits of the city," continued the counselor, "there is a settlement of lepers. It is my counsel that these who claim to be the risen dead be sent forth to herd with the lepers. Whenever one goes forth he will be compelled to cry aloud, 'Unclean! Unclean!' and those who see them will shun them. They shall be outcast until they return to their graves nevermore to rise again."

"So be it!" cried Pilate.

The soldier withdrew, and I knew that he dreaded to take this message of Pilate back to the money-changer called Tobias.

I JOURNEYED with the soldier back to the gates of the city, where those who had risen from the dead awaited the pleasure of the Roman governor.

"Know you, Tobias," said the soldier, "that Pilate has ordered that you be sent to herd with the lepers beyond Golgotha. That, having the odor of the grave upon you, you are unclean, and may not hope to mingle with the living."

A dead silence, a terrible awesome silence, fell upon that vast crowd at these words which came from the human mouthpiece of the Roman governor. Tobias crossed his arms and his head sank low upon his breast. A venerable figure, Tobias, and the others who had come forth from their graves seemed to accept him tacitly as leader and spokesman. When the head of the money-changer raised at last, there was a look of sadness on his face that made me think of that haunting look I had seen on the face of the Man Who was Crucified when, looking down upon His torturers, He had cried aloud:

"Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do!"

Only Tobias said nothing. Slowly his head swerved as his eyes traveled over the faces of those who awaited his decision. His head went back proudly as he began to speak:

"What say you, brethren? You who have come back with me from beyond the Veil of Eternal Shadows? If you had your choice, which would you do—follow the orders of Pilate and live out such new span of life as may be allotted you, among the lepers, unclean, shunned like the pestilence, wallowing in filth? Or would you turn your back once more and lift again that veil from beyond which some miracle has called us forth?"

The dramatic silence lasted but a few seconds.

Then the answer came—many-throated, resonant, palpitant with the yearnings, the sadness, and the sorrows of souls that have been rudely awakened from peaceful rest and ordered to retread the Path of Thorns and Stones which men call Life on Earth.

"Back to the graves whence we came!"

What terrible enthusiasm is this? As though one voice had given an order which must be obeyed, the crowd milled for a moment and was moving away from the city—back toward the cemetery where I had stood for a long moment among the shrouds and cerements at the lips of ravished tombs. They were running now, as though they fled from a pestilence far more deadly than leprosy. I joined them. Once I looked back. I saw the soldier toiling heavily in the rear and knew that he followed to take word of a new miracle back to Pontius Pilate.

Then we were standing in the midst of the graves which had been opened. The great crowd formed a huge circle about Tobias the money-changer. He raised his hands and spoke.

"A miracle brought us back to life. All things are possible to those who be-

lieve. A miracle can return us to the place whence we came. Lift up your eyes to the God of Life and pray for the miracle which shall be your deliverance!"

The great crowd knelt as one person, while Tobias, standing proudly erect, gazed with wide-open eyes toward the blue vault which is the sky.

"Jehovah, hear me! Take back, we beseech You, these lives which You have given, for life is long, terrible, and full of sickness and sore trials! I speak for these who, kneeling about me, cry out with their hearts that they be allowed to return again beyond the Veil of Shadows!"

Tobias prayed on, but I was not listening. Even more awed than when I had first seen it, I watched the gathering of that black cloud upon the horizon, a cloud which advanced toward this great burial ground with the swiftness of a charging host. Fiery tongues, tongues of the lightnings, crackled and snapped—those whips again, which I had heard on Golgotha.

Tobias prayed on. None in that vast assemblage of the kneeling noted the rolling cloud which swept, invincible, toward the graves.

The crowd was blotted out as when a heavy fog sweeps down a city street. In a flash of lightning I saw the upturned face of Tobias for a single instant. His eyes were opened wide, and there was an expression of unspeakable joy on his aged face. He held up his arms toward a Man who sat enthroned upon a cloud—a Man who still wore upon his head a Crown of Thorns—whose lips were parted slightly in a gentle smile of benediction. Those tongues of light played swiftly here and there, touching first this one and that one, in view for a fleeting instant only—and I knew that these lights were as one with those which came down out of that other cloud to caress the wounds in the side and limbs of the Christ. I heard a Voice which said:

"What though fathers, sisters, brothers and friends return from the grave, my people still deny me. Thou believest, Tobias, thou and these with thee; therefore is thy prayer answered!"

The cloud disappeared as swiftly as though it had never been—and I was alone in a deserted cemetery!

I looked about me once more. The cemetery looked as it had looked just after the graves had been opened, and I knew that the dead had not returned to their graves; but that they had gone when the cloud had gone, and that the Man Whose Face I had seen had called His children home again.

I returned to Pontius Pilate to see what he did when the news came.

He but repeated what he had said at another time:

"Who was this man whom we gave to be crucified?"

I whispered into the ear of Pilate:

"Why do you not wash your hands of all blame?"

He could not have heard me, true; but he beckoned again to one of his officers, and once more I stood by and watched him methodically lave his hands!

What should be the punishment of Pilate? I asked myself this question and made a wish to move up into the future to the deathbed of the Roman governor. I saw him die. I saw his spirit come forth out of his mouth and assume the shadowy outline of a man, even while his subordinates, kneeling at his bedside, bewailed his passing.

The shadowy figure took his position beside a shadow basin, and the ghostly Pontius Pilate began to lave his hands! I watched him for a long time, reading on his face the anguish which must remain there throughout eternity as, until the end of time, he must remain earthbound

beside a shadow basin, forever laving his hands to wipe away a stain that may never be cleansed.

I have seen enough, Hesford! Call me back! Call me back! My God! My God! *Why hast Thou forsaken me?*

* * * * *

I, HARVEY HESFORD, lie in a felon's cell awaiting the end! I have been condemned to the electric chair for the wanton slaying of Jess Gibbons, my dearest friend. The police came into my workshop and found him there in his chair, wires connecting his body with my machine—dead! They would not believe me when I explained that, attempting to recall the soul of Jess Gibbons, I broke something on the machine which I could not replace. Just an accident, it was; but they would not believe.

The above manuscript was prepared by me from the fragmentary notes which, obeying the will of the departed spirit of Jess Gibbons, the lifeless hand of Gibbons wrote upon the paper I had placed before him to receive the revelation. For three days and nights I sat and watched the eery moving of that dead hand as, slowly, it spelled out the words of Jess.

Not all of the above is as Jess wrote it. His notes were written as of the present moment and lacked coherence. I but made his notes over into a connected story, for the purpose of laying the entire matter before the world, hoping that enough people will believe me, and will join in saving me from the chair.

For, after all, is it not punishment enough for me to know that, through my machinations, Jess Gibbons is condemned for nineteen hundred years to stand beside the ghost of Pontius Pilate while the great murderer tries to wash the bloody stains from his hands?

And is that his punishment for a lifetime of blasphemy?

That the Sun moves north as men travel south, until finally it shines continuously in the north.

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WE ARE often asked what are the best stories that have appeared in WEIRD TALES. To answer this *ex cathedra* would be arbitrary, because the only test of a story's greatness would be the editor's own preference. There is another test, however—the popularity of a story with our readers. When a story in the magazine so grips the imagination that votes continue to pour in for it months and even years later, then it is safe to assume that the story possesses what is generally known as "It." By such a test, *The Woman of the Wood* by A. Merritt leads the field. Other stories that have piled up an impressive total of votes throughout the years are *The Outsider* and *The Call of Cthulhu* by H. P. Lovecraft; *Shambleau* by C. L. Moore; *When the Green Star Waned* by Nictzin Dyalhis; *The Last Horror* by Eli Colter; *The Wind that Tramps the World* by Frank Owen; *The Tenants of Broussac* and several other tales of Jules de Grandin by Seabury Quinn; *Revelations in Black* by Carl Jacobi; *The Werewolf of Ponkert* by H. Warner Munn; *Skull-face* and *The Shadow Kingdom* by Robert E. Howard. And there are others. One story that was among the most popular ever published in WEIRD TALES had a paradoxical reception by you, the readers: *Lochinvar Lodge* by Clyde Burt Clason. This story piled up a mountain of votes, but the votes against it almost equaled the votes in its favor. Explain that, if you can.

The Genius of Lovecraft

Francis Flagg writes from Tucson, Arizona: "The death at a relatively early age, of Howard P. Lovecraft has undoubtedly robbed weird literature of one of its master writers. Lovecraft and I had corresponded over a number of years on such subjects as monarchism, socialism, communism, materialism, religion, and incidentally, literature. Of Lovecraft's standing as a writer of great and unique talent there can be little question. His weird tales are comparable to Poe's and superior to O'Brien's. There seems to be a tendency to separate Lovecraft the materialist from Lovecraft the weird artist and thinker, as if the man's brain had been contained in two compartments, but indeed this is wrong. Lovecraft was never more the materialist than when he was the weird artist. There is a psychological reality in many of his tales that could only have been set down by a materialist thinker. This was true of Poe; and a study of Lovecraft's writings (comparing them to the products of contemporary weird writers) will reveal that this is true of him also. Lovecraft is dead, and it is with a keen sense of loss and real grief that I realize his brilliant letters will never come my way again."

Rald

Louis Kuslan, of West Haven, Connecticut, writes: "As a recent reader of WEIRD TALES, I wish to convey my congratulations to the best fantasy magazine on the market. Your stories are of a type which holds my attention to the end. The list of authors is a list of the kings and sometimes queens of fantasy. Here's the way I size the July issue up. The cover, by Virgil Finlay, is the best that I've ever seen on any magazine. Rald and Thrine stand out as if they were real. How long has Mr. Finlay been doing your covers? He is practically perfect. I vote *The Thief of Forthe* the best story, closely followed by *The Whistling Corpse* and *Raider of the Spaceways*. . . . Has Clifford Ball ever written any other stories about Rald? If not, urge him to do so." [Yes, Mr. Ball has written a stirring novelette, *The Goddess Awakes*, which tells of another weird adven-

ture of Rald, the thief of Forthe. It will be published in this magazine soon.—THE EDITOR.]

Weird Tales Is "Tops"

Bryce M. Walton, of Murtaugh, Idaho, writes: "I have read WEIRD TALES steadily for the last five years, and I say it's 'tops'. It is not only tops among weird chronicles but will stand the test against the so-called 'quality magazines'. It is a subtle air of difference, of some indescribable and weird inspiration guiding your authors' pens, that keeps WEIRD TALES on top Preserve that atmosphere and you can't lose. . . . In my humble opinion, it is not necessary to load the stories with nauseating and hair-raising monstrosities, although I realize their appropriateness, of course. But it seems to me that the sheer etheric beauty that pervades many of your stories is ofttimes more at home between your covers than the horror and terror types. Pure beauty is very, very weird, for in this world of ours it is rarely witnessed or felt; therefore it falls under the category of unusual and bizarre, upon which WEIRD TALES is based. Examples of this type that I can recall to mind without reference are C. L. Moore's *Lost Paradise,* and other stories by that author; also many parts of Clark Ashton Smith's incomparable fantasies. . . . Mrs. Brundage's cover for *The Carnal God,* in the June issue, was the best cover I have seen, nude or no nude. It depicted better than words the weirdness that lay beneath the cover. It fairly shrieked aloud from the news stands, drowning everything else into the background."

Howard and Lovecraft

Betty Murray, of Akron, Ohio, writes: "I want to weep on your editorial shoulder about what, to me, as to hundreds of other readers, is an acute personal loss; I mean the loss of Robert E. Howard and H. P. Lovecraft. Of the two, my personal favorite was Howard, as his blood and thunder type of stories appealed more to me, but I fully recognized and appreciated the mastery of Lovecraft in his more truly uncanny field. Howard's tales were classics. They rank with the greatest of all great adventure stories.

BACK COPIES

Because of the many requests for back issues of WEIRD TALES, the publishers do their best to keep a sufficient supply on hand to meet all demands. This magazine was established early in 1923 and there has been a steady drain on the supply of back copies ever since. At present, we have the following back numbers on hand for sale:

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These back numbers contain many fascinating stories. If you are interested in obtaining any of the back copies on this list please hurry your order because we can not guarantee that the list will be as complete as it now is within the next 30 days. The price on all back issues is 25c per copy. Mail all orders to:

WEIRD TALES

840 N. Michigan Ave. Chicago, Illinois, U. S. A.

His characters lived and breathed. Lovecraft veiled his yarns with chiffon. They were misty horrors seen dimly, and were less read than felt, I think. To the creator of King Kull, Conan the Mighty, Brule the Spear-Slayer, and Solomon Kane, for glory perished, hail! To glory present, *vale!* To the great H. P. L., honor and praise. As the ancients said, Oh Kings, live for ever! I do earnestly hope that you will see fit to present books with the complete and collected works of these two collosi of weird literature, prose and poetry both, for the benefit of the ravening hordes of readers who would welcome them. Now to say my say about WT—I think it's swell. Since 1929, when I first recall reading our mag., it has progressed by the proverbial leaps and bounds from mediocrity to the real thing. Of course, some stories, over the years, have crept in which were out of place, poorly written, banal, or otherwise not so hot. That is natural and unescapable. No publication could hope to maintain a standard of perfection, and the tares do grow, even in the most carefully cultivated wheat. The good stories, and the splendid stories, more than make up for the few lousy ones. Of your authors, what can be said? C. L. Moore, Clark Ashton Smith, Earl Peirce, Eando Binder, Mary Counselman, Henry Kuttner, the supremely smooth Seabury Quinn, and all the rest are great. I'm not too crazy about Robert Bloch, but that may be prejudice. I can't quite forgive him for razzing Howard. I do applaud, very loudly, C. L. Moore, who has the mysterious touch of genius. E. Hoffmann Price is another grand writer. I shall never forget *The Stranger from Kurdistan,* and I do wish it could be reprinted again. I have liked immensely Quinn's occasional stories about persons other than Doctor de Grandin, although the saucy Jules was my first love in your magazine, and remains a prime favorite. . . . I wish you would go light on the space-fiction and scientific stuff. A little, for those who like it, yes. But not too much. Keep WT *weird.* This means the Doctor Satan type of thing, too. And *please,* don't stop running serials. Some of your best stories have been serials. They give a person something to look forward to each month."

Northwest Smith

Dorothy Hoyt, of New York City, writes: "Before a boost—a wail! Why oh why can't we have Northwest Smith and his slinky Venusian friend again? Is there a conspiracy on to keep him out of WT? I'd rather read about him than any other character, though Conan and Jirel (by the way where is she?) are also favorites. Jules de Grandin and Doctor Satan are two more pets. In the July issue, *The Ocean Ogre* was swell! So was *The Thief of Forthe;* but please some of the old ones next. Here's waiting for N. W. Smith." [You will soon have Northwest Smith, and Jirel too, in a new story by C. L. Moore.—THE EDITOR.]

A New Conan?

Laurence A. Lamb, of New York City, writes: "When I heard 'Conan' was dead I didn't hurry to the stands on the first of each month as quickly as before. But now I have found a writer, Mr. Clifford Ball, author of *Duar the Accursed* and *The Thief of Forthe,* who hurries me as fast as ever! Probably the name is a pseudonym—or has the shade of Howard returned? I never heard of him before, but I'll be glad to hear of him again. What chances?" [We shall shortly publish a fascinating novelette of Rald, the thief of Forthe. No, Clifford Ball is not a pen name. —THE EDITOR.]

Miss Hemken Speaking

Gertrude Hemken, whom we recently had the pleasure of meeting for the first time, writes from Chicago: "The sea seems to be an inexhaustible source of inspiration for shuddery yarns. We find *The Whistling Corpse* and *The Ocean Ogre* in one issue. I prefer the former by author Pendarves—there is more gripping intensity—more fear. Mr. Smith's verse to HPL is so suited to that master of weird fiction—which brings to mind that which has bothered me for a long time. I would like to have a copy of Lovecraft's *Fungi from Yuggoth*—I have some verses but would like the complete set. Is it available? Well, HK—*Raider of the Spaceways* wasn't bad. If you hadn't directed your characters to the Nite Side, I would not have liked the story. Why is darkness so fearfully fascinating? Kelley is really going to town with *The Last Pharaoh.* Bodiless heads are so very strange an idea to me that I can't quite conceive the utter enormity of it all. That Atma should suddenly appear all in one piece is surprizing — even though our heroine and kid brother are supposedly safe.

I have a sneaking suspicion the whole thing is a hoax—with profound and abject apologies to the author should my suspicions prove incorrect. . . . Hey—my mind isn't quite clear about *The Creeper in the Crypt*. When the creeping thing slithered over the basement floor and used the gangster Regetti for a tasty tidbit—Mr. Bloch tells us of The Thing supposedly feeding on the gangster—yet the closing paragraph just has Regetti chewed to ribbons. Wasn't the Creeper very hungry? Anyhow—that sound as of marrow being sucked out—my throat still contracts and I have the greasiest feeling all the way down my esophagus. Your reprint —I like him—for you see, I like stories of time in the past—scenes of things that happened—to witness them in our present state —what else but a time-machine can offer that? Or isn't my meaning clear? It doesn't matter. Of course, I didn't like this man's going back so very far." [As to your query about *Fungi from Yuggoth*: Messrs. Wandrei and Derleth are working to bring out a volume of HPL's verse. Other projected volumes will contain his stories and letters. —THE EDITOR.]

Pendarves' Sea Story

Donald Allgeier, of Springfield, Missouri, writes: "Finlay's cover for July is the best yet. It's really a masterpiece. I only wish he could have given us a few Conan covers. He depicts the thief almost as I had pictured Conan to myself. I'm delighted to note the increase in Pendarves' output. He's a masterful writer. *The Whistling Corpse* is one of his best. It's just about the best weird story of the sea I've ever read. Vying with this story for first place is *The Last Pharaoh*, a great story by another remarkable find. *Jail-Break* is very well done and packs a surprize. *The Thief of Forthe* is close behind the first two. Ball is still a little rough in his style, but his plots are good and he handles action creditably. Let him give us a series. . . . The June WT is studded with some fine stories. The best, of course, is *The Carnal God*. Speer is a master. The cover for this story was attractive, but poorly proportioned, I thought."

One Hundred Per Cent

Gertrude Gordon, of New York City, writes: "In all fairness I feel I should send as enthusiastic a card *praising* this month's

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WEIRD TALES as was critical the card I sent a month or so ago protesting against the stories. This month the magazine is 100 per cent *real* weird tales. I don't think you ever got out a better number. I feel a lot better. I like the cover—Virgil Finlay evidently reads the stories and gets the pictures like the text, which is more than Brundage ever does. The cover is splendid. The stories all are fine. Even the reprint is unusually good. I like the new character, Rald, in *The Thief of Forthe*. Evidently we will have a new Conan type. This type is almost as lovable, fully as fascinating. I hope we hear more of him. *All* the stories are so good I cannot select one specially. Congratulations and thank you."

From a French Enthusiast

Jacques Bergier, of Paris, writes: "Over a year has elapsed since I last wrote to you. WEIRD TALES still remains 'the unique magazine' and has printed some outstanding tales during that year; such as Moore's *Lost Paradise*, Lovecraft's *Haunter of the Dark*, Williamson's *Ruler of Fate*, and Howard's *The Hour of the Dragon*. I deeply and sincerely mourn the passing of H. P. Lovecraft. I believe that Lovecraft was one of America's greatest writers, an equal of Poe. I believe that recognition of this fact will come after a lapse of years, as with Poe. Such tales as *The Music of Erich Zann, The Dreams in the Witch-House* and *The Temple*, as well as his cycle of the Elder Gods and strange civilizations, and the extraordinary *Through the Gates of the Silver Key*, will remain, marking a writer of extraordinary power, to be placed with Poe, Wells, Machen and Blackwood. The passing of Lovecraft seems to me to mark the end of an epoch in the history of American imaginative fiction, an history that begins with Poe, continues with Bierce's *Can Such Things Be?*, Chambers' *The King in Yellow*, Merritt's *The Moon Pool*, and then the era of fantastic story magazines of which only WEIRD TALES and a science-fiction magazine now continue to print real fantasy. I think that many of the stories published in this last era—and among them, almost all of Lovecraft's—were great and will endure. And in spite—or perhaps because—of my scientific training I sometimes think that perhaps Lovecraft had a glimpse across 'undreamable abysses,' of facts about the structure of our universe that science will one day discover. I hope that WT will go on, printing less and less stories of fear and horror and more and more stories of real fantasy. There have been in your pages too many werewolves, vampires, and primordial slime. Stories by young authors which I would term really weird tales are Bloch's *The Dark Demon*, Kuttner's *The Eater of Souls*, and Johnson's *They*. . . . I thank you again for many enjoyable stories."

Orchids to Mrs. Brundage

M. E. Ellison, of Jefferson City, Missouri, writes: "An orchid to M. Brundage for her superb cover design. Two orchids to WEIRD TALES for the June issue, every story swell! Here's a whole bouquet to the co-authors of *The Carnal God*—a great story in every respect; let me cast my vote to John R. Speer and Carlisle Schnitzer for their story. Glad you are having Speer in your magazine again; he can appear in your issues often and we won't mind."

Howard Reprints Requested

Leslie M. Bullen, of Cheshire, England, writes: "Some six or seven months have elapsed since I first purchased one of your admirable magazines, and since then I have read each number with great avidity. Owing to the difficulty I experienced in obtaining copies, I only recently heard of the unfortunate death of Robert E. Howard, and I take this opportunity of saying how very sorry I was. In my humble opinion he was a more than successful rival to that prince of imaginative writers, Edgar Rice Burroughs. I hope that in the future you will reprint some of his past stories, and give those of us who unfortunately missed them, a chance of enjoying them. Of course, I like the other tales very much, and think them far above the standard of the other periodicals."

Nix on Logical Endings

Robert Leonard Russell, of Mount Vernon, Illinois, writes: "The May issue is one in which I just can't pick the best story. With three as fine as *The Salem Horror, The Horror in the Burying-Ground*, and *Duar the Accursed* I am stumped when it comes to picking Number 1. The first two are in the Lovecraft fashion and the third has all the ruggedness and sweep of a Conan yarn. I liked everything in the issue except *The Mark of the Monster*. It seemed

like a blurred carbon copy of the late HPL's classic, *The Dunwich Horror.* Nix on these logical endings in WT. Brundage did a swell job on the cover. Her best in an eon. Where on earth did you find this Jim Mooney? His illustration for *The Salem Horror* was the very essence of the bizarre, full of shadowy suggestions. Let's have more by him soon. Thanks for giving us *The Horror on the Links.* It was originally published just a short time before I became a reader of WT. Please print more of the early de Grandin tales and plenty of old Lovecraft yarns. I believe you should print an occasional serial, two, three or four parts, but never any of these six, seven or more part yarns."

Attracted by the Cover

Virginia Dirlam, of Wichita, Kansas, writes: "I happened to pick up a copy of your April magazine purely by accident, attracted by the unusual picture on the cover. After reading the story from which this illustration was made, I have decided to make WEIRD TALES one of my regular purchases at the news stand. John R. Speer's *Symphony of the Damned* I consider one of the best stories of its type I have ever read. I was too interested to put the book down until I had finished reading it, thereby missing part of my sleep, but consider that the story was worth it.

Please print more of Mr. Speer's stories. He has a wonderful gift for making one feel the same emotions as do the characters he has created."

Merritt's Tree Story

Captain Jay Wilmer Benjamin writes from Lewisburg, West Virginia: "You're doing a good job with WT. I marked two stories in the April issue—don't comment often, for it seems presumptuous to point out the faults in other writers' stuff, if any, and seems hollow to praise everything—and someone has borrowed said issue. But I personally prefer the stories which deal with modern life. There are exceptions. I liked Conan. He was so lusty and vigorous he quite took away your breath, at times. And Moore can write, all right. Best story you ever ran, of the type, was the one you used originally, then reprinted—can't recall the name, but it was all about the trees in the woods. They lived. I still have it around

NEXT MONTH

The Shunned House

By H. P. LOVECRAFT

ONE of the acknowledged world masters of weird fiction, H. P. Lovecraft, has gone to the shadowy land which his genius has so often depicted in his fascinating stories. He leaves behind him a rich treasure of great stories that are a valued addition to the world's storehouse of imaginative literature.

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some place; think it is well worth keeping." [The story referred to is A. Merritt's truly remarkable tale, *The Woman of the Wood*.—THE EDITOR.]

The Witch Walks

Walter L. Reeve, of Sharon, Massachusetts, writes: "The April issue was so good it's hard to pick the best story. I'd rate *Symphony of the Damned* first, followed by *The Mannikin* and *The Death Mask*. The reprint was exceptionally good. I'd like to see more poems, such as *The Witch Walks in Her Garden*, in WEIRD TALES. While not really going the distance myself, I can remember when stationed in the heart of the Bitter Root Mountains in Idaho I used to send all the way to Orofino and have my favorite magazine, WEIRD TALES, brought to me by pack train. We were about seventy miles from Orofino at the time."

Raider of the Spaceways

Johns Harrington, of San Fernando, California, writes: "With the July issue of your magazine, I followed my general rule of reading the stories that sounded and looked like the best first. In scanning the table of contents, I tabbed *Raider of the Spaceways* by Henry Kuttner to be saved for the very last, because I have somehow built up a prejudice against these 'far in the future' yarns. Usually, they seem very much overloaded with unnecessary pseudo-scientific data that barricade the mind from the intellectual relaxation for which most people read your entertaining stories. What is more, this type of tale is usually weighted down with weird wordage and the terrific terrors appear strained. May I say that *Raider of the Spaceways* not only contained the proper amount and handling of the pseudo-scientific, but also concerned the sort of living, easy-to-imagine horror which makes you enjoy a weird tale to its utmost. I thought this yarn was the best in the issue, although there were other very good ones. I thought *Raider of the Spaceways* one of the most fascinating and thrilling yarns I have read in your magazine in a long while, though I almost always enjoy the total contents of each issue."

Concise Comments

An unsigned letter from Spokane, Washington, says: "Whoops! The man on the cover of last January's issue has the features and hair of my own dear husband. After reading of the nasty habits of the man on the cover, I was mad at my honey-pap for days."

Alvin V. Pershing, of Anderson, Indiana, writes: "I would have liked *The Mark of the Monster* first-rate indeed if the author had not 'explained' things rationally at the end. This explanation ruined the whole story for me because it left a sour taste in my mouth. I like my horrors *raw*."

M. C. Ellis, of Walla Walla, Washington, writes: "My first choice of stories in the June issue is *The Carnal God*, by John R. Speer and Carlisle Schnitzer. This story is very fascinating and is the type I particularly enjoy. The cover design portraying the characters of this story is very attractive."

Raymond Klekamp, of Columbia, Missouri, writes: "I was very sorry to hear of the death of H. P. Lovecraft, and in my poor opinion Edgar Allan Poe couldn't hold a competition with him, at least in any of his works that I have read. His *Haunter of the Dark* and *Thing on the Door-step* I considered unrivaled masterpieces. I also liked Henry Hasse's *Guardian of the Book*, although I thought the plot motive ran practically parallel."

Florence B. Smith, of Los Angeles, writes: "I liked Clifford Ball's *Thief of Forthe*. He has something in his character Rald a bit like Conan, a most likable rogue. May we have some more, please?"

A. V. Ross, of London, England, writes: "Have been a reader of WEIRD for three years now. Congratulations; your magazine is really 'unique'. Give us more exotic fantasy (like C. I. Moore's *Tree of Life*) and less horror."

The Most Popular Story

Readers, what is your favorite story in this issue? Write a letter to the Eyrie, WEIRD TALES, telling us not only which story you like, but also those that you dislike, and why. Your favorite story in the July issue, as shown by your votes and letters to the Eyrie, was *The Thief of Forthe* by Clifford Ball. This was pressed for first place by the third installment of *The Last Pharaoh* by Thomas P. Kelley.

W. T.—8

COMING NEXT MONTH

IN the kitchen two peasants sat, an old man and an older woman. They rose as I entered.

"Who are you?" I asked in English.

They simply smiled and waved their hands. I repeated my question in Italian.

"We serve," the man replied.

"Serve whom?"

"Whoever is the master."

"Have you been here long?"

"We have always been here. It is our home."

His statement amused me, and I commented, "The masters come and go, but you remain?"

"It seems so."

"Many masters?"

"Alas! yes. They come and go. Nice young men, like you, but they do not stay. They buy and look at the view, and eat with us a few days, and then they are gone."

"And then the villa is sold again?"

The man shrugged his shoulders. "How should we know? We simply serve."

"Then prepare me my dinner. And serve it outside, under the grapevine, where I can see the view." . . .

And so the young man bought the villa, and in doing so he was drawn into an adventure as horrible and at the same time as fascinating as any of the horrors conceived in the tortured mind of Dante or of Poe. This amazing tale will be published complete in the next issue of WEIRD TALES:

TIGER CAT

By David H. Keller

——Also——

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What strange compulsion drove an ordinarily gentle and cultured man, on one night of each week, to roam the city streets and commit a ghastly crime?

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By H. P. LOVECRAFT

A posthumous story of immense power, written by a master of weird fiction — a tale of a revolting horror in the cellar of an old house in New England.

THE LONG ARM

By FRANZ HABL

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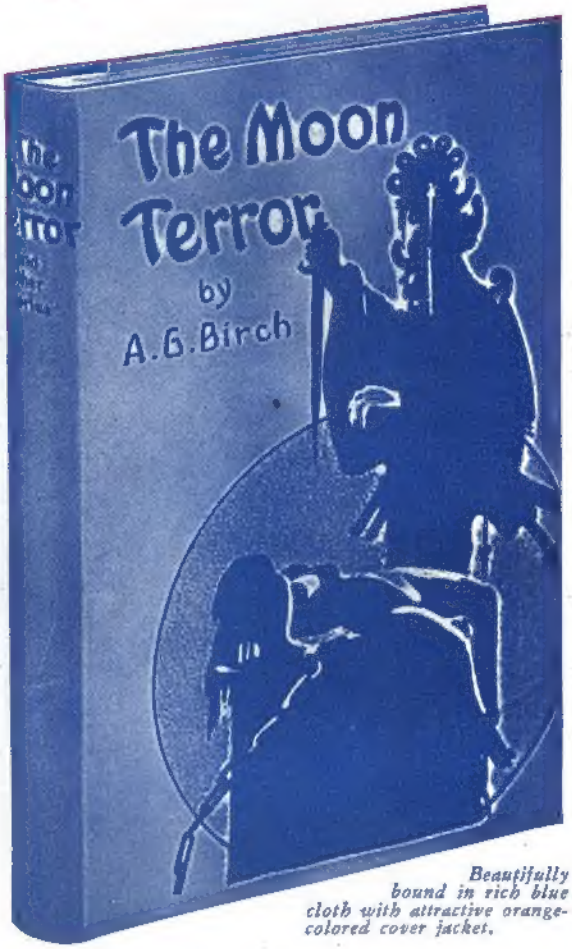

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